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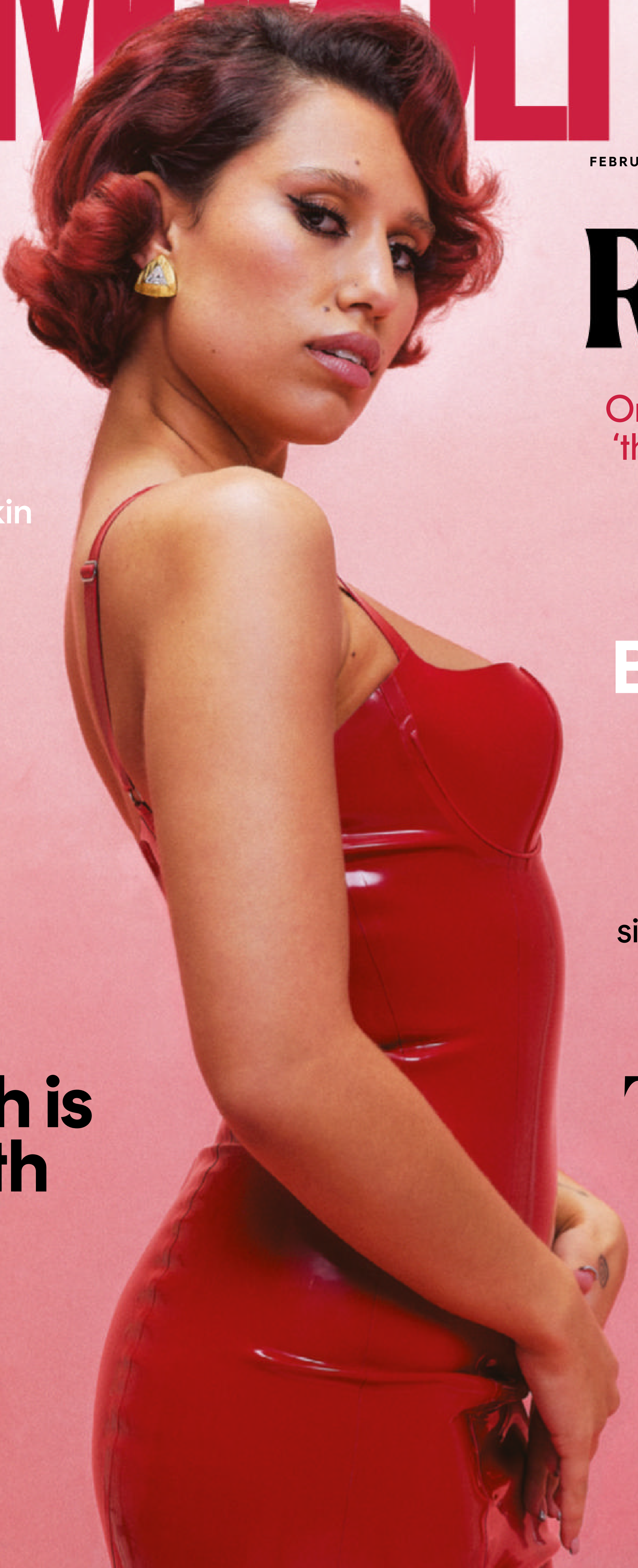

Let's glow!

Hydration heroes that'll save even the most stressed-out skin

Raye

On how she fought 'the man' and won (with a little help from Beyoncé)

You spend 84,365 hours at work...

We've found the secret to making them happier

Baby got (a bad) back

How to fix your posture and stop sitting like a shrimp

How much is your health worth?

On the front line of the endometriosis epidemic – and the clinics cashing in

The rise of 'sex for the story'

TikTok's wildest stars reveal all

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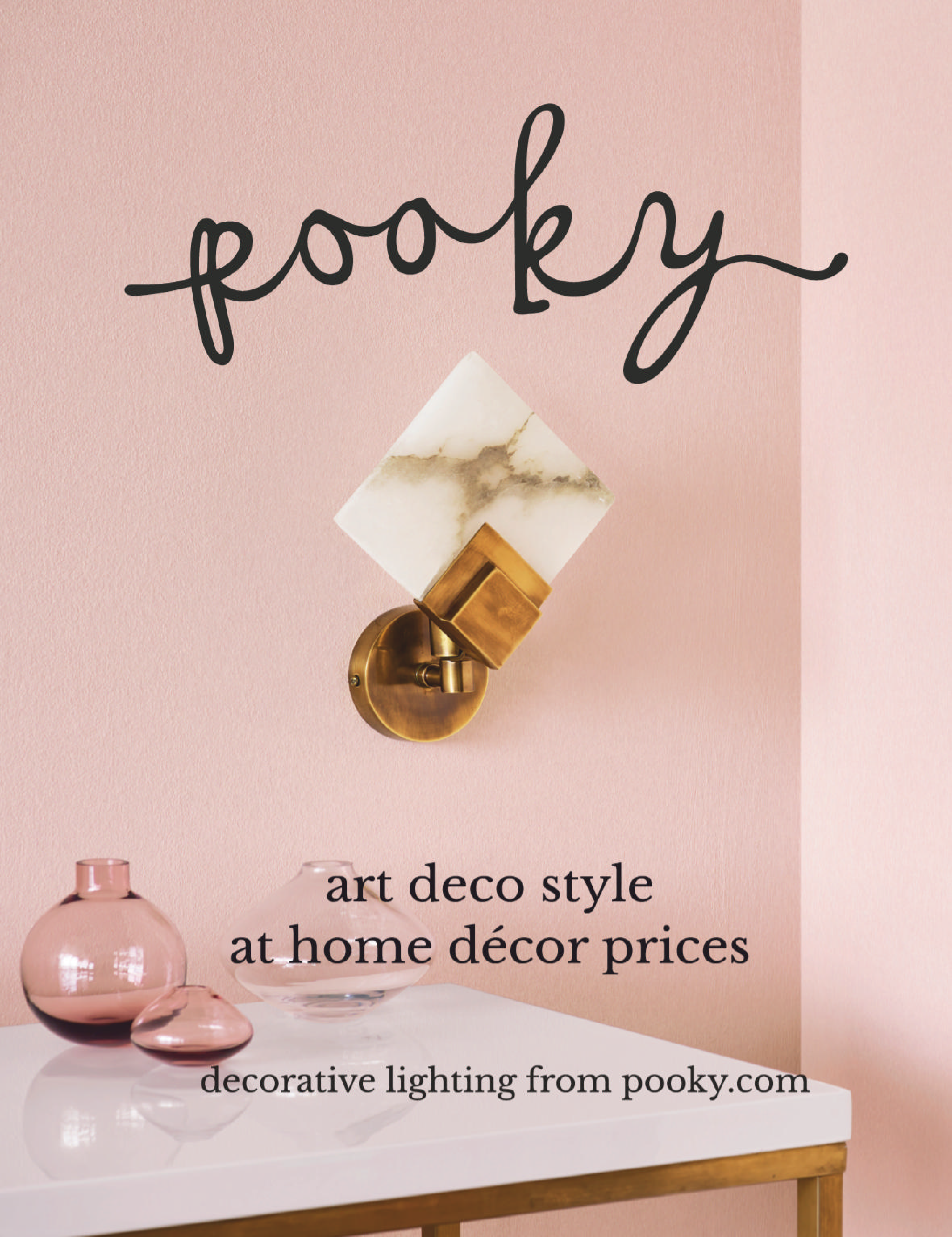
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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2023

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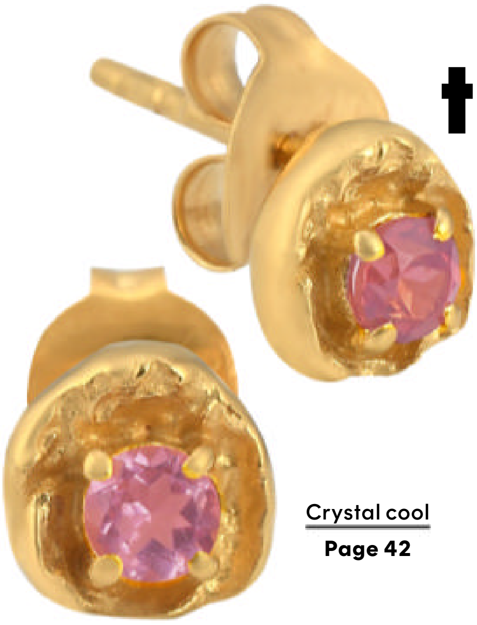

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: EM COLE
STYLING: SASKIA QUIRKE

Hair: Sarah Necia. Make-up: LAN. Raye wears: dress, Atsuko Kudo; earrings, vintage Yves Saint Laurent at Omnēque

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What gives you 'the ick' in relationships?

The noise when they eat a banana. And let's face it, that's unavoidable. No one is safe

Taking ages to choose from a restaurant menu. Get me an Aperol Spritz already

When a guy wears ultra skinny jeans, it's over!

Having an Android phone. That's it. That's enough.

When their laces are done up so tight that the bow is massive

When they pose for a photo by... pretending to be scrolling on their phone. I'm all for a candid pic, but *why*?

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Crystal jewellery bringing good vibes to your 2023 (p42)

PHOTOGRAPHY: KRYSTAL NG/UNSPLASH

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From the editor

As I write this, I am sat on my living room floor, surrounded by chaotically packed cardboard boxes. In the fortnight running up to moving flats, I've gone through excitement, fear, optimism, sadness, impatience and reluctance, to name but a few. (I have also gone through a hideous amount of pizza, but that's beside the point). Because while new starts can be thrilling, they can also be unsettling and incredibly daunting.

Our powerhouse cover star, Raye, certainly knows what it's like to start over, and the dissonance many of us can feel between the 'together' face we present in public and the sense of unravelling we may feel in private. Signing to one of the world's biggest record labels at just 17, she's had multiple Top 10 singles and worked with artists ranging from Beyoncé to John Legend. However, everything was not as it seemed. On p72, the singer opens up about her seven-year journey to finally release a debut album, and how she did it entirely on her own terms.

So, we've devoted this issue to doing 2023 your way. Maybe you're someone who welcomes the new year with a wardrobe clear-out, a fresh diary and a wide-eyed feeling of endless possibility. But if you want to crawl under your duvet and politely decline all visitors like a Victorian widow in mourning, you're not alone. This year certainly brings its challenges, so this issue is packed with as much helpful, feel-good advice and comfort as possible – from an industry insider's guide to the best budget beauty, to how to get your work mojo back. Oh, and how to find a bra that actually fits. (Because who can tackle any of life's bullsh*t when your lingerie feels like a torture device?) And, if in doubt, take a leaf out of Raye's book this year and 'trust your gut'.

→ **Claire Hodgson**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PHOTOGRAPHY: EM COLE. HAIR: SARAH NECIA. MAKE-UP: LAN. RAYE WEARS: COAT, TOP AND SKIRT, ROTATE; EARRINGS, ATELIERSÒ

The *Cosmo* Quiz

Raye edition

IF I WASN'T A MUSICIAN I'D

Be a lawyer?

MY GO-TO TAKEAWAY

Kricket
(the most delicious indian spot!)

MY MOST LOVED/USED BEAUTY PRODUCT

Embryolise face cream!
Benefit roller liner.

I CAN'T LEAVE THE HOUSE WITHOUT

Headphones

MY SIGNATURE DISH TO COOK IS

Banoffee Pie

THE BEST THING ABOUT TOURING IS

The second
I get on stage

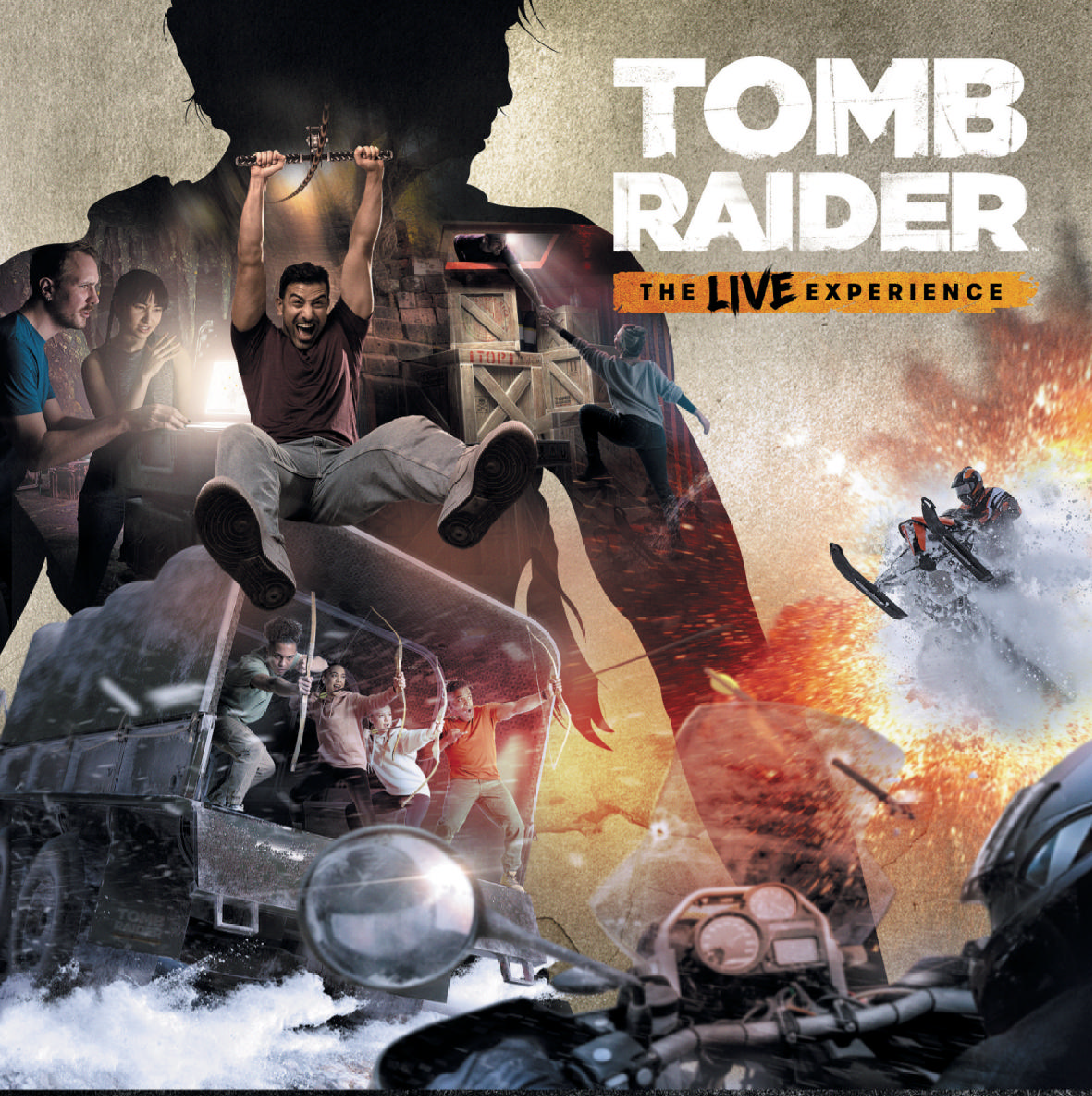
MY GUILTY PLEASURE TV SHOW TO BINGE

Selling Sunset

I WANT MY 2023 TO BE

Full of integrity, proving to myself I can achieve the goals I have set.

Raye



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At last, the romcom is back
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Who's your questionable crush?
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Meet your new fave girl group
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Five books set for the Hollywood treatment
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play

New year, new faves

11 things to listen to, watch and do to start 2023 the right way

WORDS: EMILY GULLA

Women Talking

In cinemas 10 February

Rooney Mara, Claire Foy, Jessie Buckley and Frances McDormand come together for this important film about women in an isolated religious community, who reassess their faith after a series of harrowing sexual assaults.

You Season 4

Parts 1 and 2 premiering

9 February and 9 March, Netflix

Netflix's fan-favourite serial killer drama returns, and this time Joe is in our very own London. Marienne is still on the scene and, with Joe now working as a professor, there's a whole new bunch of characters ready to become embroiled in his schemes. It's tense.

Daisy Jones & The Six

Premiering 3 March, Prime Video

The hugely anticipated TV adaptation of Taylor Jenkins Reid's novel lands weekly this spring. Thought to be somewhat based on the members of Fleetwood Mac, the story follows a 1970s LA rock band on their whirlwind rise to fame. BookTok is ready and waiting with the novel comparisons.

2023 Brit Awards

11 February, ITV

Live from The O_2 arena, the biggest night in British music is back on screens for its 30th anniversary, celebrating everyone from your favourite artists to the newcomers you don't even know you love yet. Expect epic performances and emosh acceptance speeches. It's basically British history in the making.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LILLIE EIGER. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: LILLIE EIGER; GETTY IMAGES; LACEY TERRELL/PRIME VIDEO; ALAMY

Lockwood & Co

27 January, Netflix

Bridgerton's Ruby Stokes stars in this adaptation of the hugely popular YA novel of the same name. She plays Lucy Carlyle, a teenage ghost-hunter who joins a paranormal investigation agency that looks into gruesome crimes.

Dylan UK tour

UK venues, 6 to 21 February

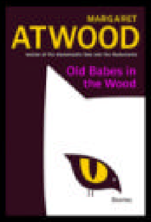
Twenty-three-year-old Dylan embarks on a UK tour of 12 venues this February, following her 2022 debut mixtape *The Greatest Thing I'll Never Learn*. She's supported the likes of Ed Sheeran on tour, and we're predicting great things. Grab her at a small venue while you can. Visit iamdylanofficial.com/live for ticket info.

Lizzo UK tour

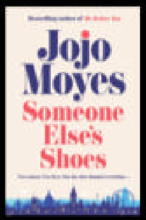
UK venues, 8 to 16 March

The musical queen herself is on UK soil this March, hitting up arenas in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow. The tour follows Lizzo's chart-topping 2022 album *Special*, and we're expecting 10/10 tunes lifted straight out of our pre-drinks playlist. Visit lizzomusic.com/tour for tickets.

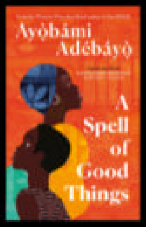
Get lit



***Old Babes In The Wood* by Margaret Atwood, 7 March**
The incredible Margaret Atwood returns with an enthralling collection.



***Someone Else's Shoes* by Jojo Moyes, 2 February**
A misplaced gym bag causes two women to walk in each other's shoes – in more ways than one.



***A Spell Of Good Things* by Ayobami Adebayo, 9 February**
Two children from wildly different backgrounds cross paths in Nigeria.

CARIAD LLOYD
you are not alone

***You Are Not Alone* by Cariad Lloyd, 19 January**
Comedian and host of the *Griefcast* podcast Cariad Lloyd discusses death and loss.

Lily James and Shazad Latif in *What's Love Got To Do With It?* – out 24 February

Big-budget romcoms are back and honestly thank god

It's like everyone finally realised they're exactly what we need – with some tweaks

WORDS: EMMA BATY

It's been more than 10 years since Hollywood killed the romcom. Since *Crazy, Stupid, Love* served as the last gasp of a Great American Movie Genre. Those beautiful, glossy films may have been fluff, but they were more than just fluff – they were made unapologetically for a female audience, and often called out class and gender disparities *while also* being rich with the eye-candy-est eye candy of our time.

But who am I kidding… why do we need that when we have a million iterations of the same film in which caped men bash one another's heads in for reasons so simultaneously confusing and important that they deserve sequel upon sequel, right? Like… I'm grateful to the Marvels and *Top Guns* of the world for propping up the film industry, sure, but can you honestly tell me you remember the plot of *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse of Madness*? (I don't even need to ask if you can quote *How To Lose A Guy in 10 Days*.)

The problem with having the majority of big-budget, entertainment-as-escapism films in cinemas being about (1) superheroes or (2) Tom Cruise – aside from the fact that they are largely made by, for and about men – is that they take up

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

all the budget. The films made by, for and about women in the past 10 years haven't got anywhere close to the same blockbuster treatment from the studios behind them.

It's hard to pinpoint exactly what happened here beyond, you know, systemic sexism. But I'm going to try, starting with some insider industry stuff. Before streaming services really took off, a nearly extinct thing called the mid-budget film existed. These titles, including most romcoms, provided more variety for what you could see at the cinema and helped studios make a lot of money. But I'll admit it: the romcoms of the 2010s weren't doing anything particularly innovative. Some of them felt straight-up regressive. (I give you *Friends With Benefits* and *No Strings Attached*, which pretended to be about sexual liberation but *checks notes* ultimately reinforced outdated relationship norms.) Audiences, perhaps also bored of watching so many straight, white people fall in love, started to lose interest. So the studios started to lose money and started diverting funds into either $300million blockbusters or $10million prestige plays, says Scott Meslow, who wrote the literal book – *From Hollywood With Love: The Rise And Fall (And Rise Again) Of The Romantic Comedy* – on the topic.

But people still crave films that make them feel good. Honestly, we've been kind of desperate for them, during a stretch when we've witnessed politics laced with sexism, a global pandemic where women were forced to leave the workforce in droves, and devastating attacks on our reproductive rights.

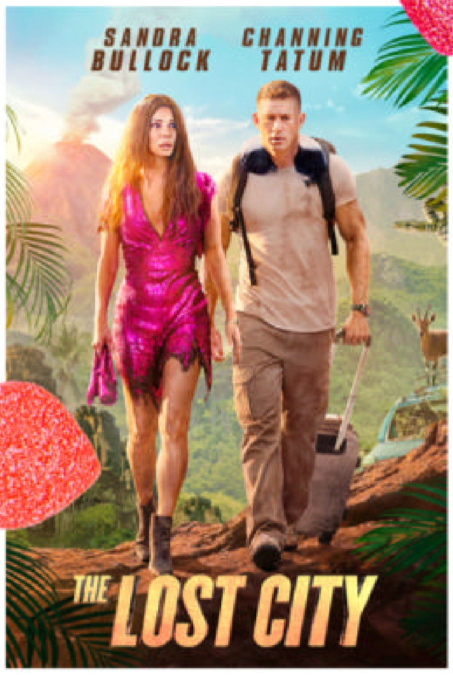
To its credit, there's one brand that realised this early. 'After the genre had been largely abandoned,' says Meslow. 'Netflix figured out that there was a huge underserved audience there.' The streaming platform took the success of films such as *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* (2018) and *The Kissing Booth* (2018), both based on YA books, and began spinning out wave after wave of similar projects, reinventing stale romantic narratives and proving that even younger audiences – once thought to be anti-romcom – were also eager for their return.

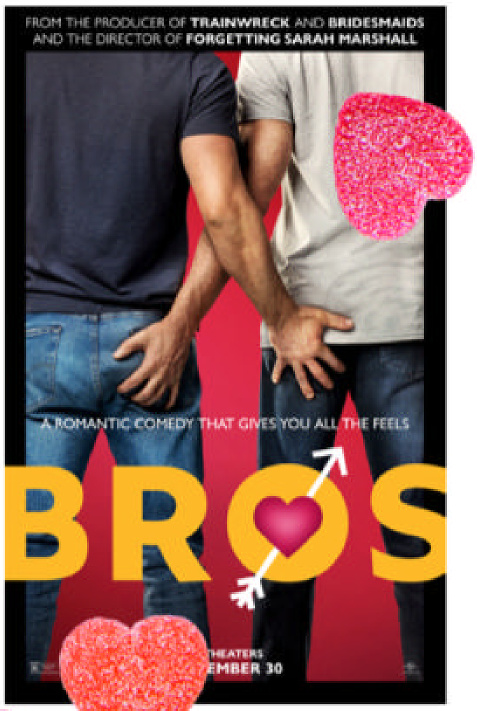
And now, A-list actors, the very ones who made romcoms so great in the first place, want back in. On her 2022 *Ticket To Paradise* press tour, Julia Roberts said she wanted to give audiences a 'holiday from life' after the past few years, to which I say, 'Yes, please.' Lindsay Lohan told *Cosmopolitan* about her festive film *Falling For Christmas*: 'It's always fun to work on something that makes people happy and provides a bit of an escape.' Sandra Bullock is back. So is J-Lo. Meg Ryan is about to direct her first film ever and it's a romcom. Nancy Meyers, who wrote and directed iconic entries to the genre – *It's Complicated* and *The Holiday* – is making her first film in seven years. We've also recently had *The Lost City*, *Marry Me*, *Bros*, *Shotgun Wedding*, and *Fire Island*. Films in which there's just as much love and lust as before but with characters who are diverse, empowered and capable of choosing their own happiness instead of just lucking into it. It's about fucking time.

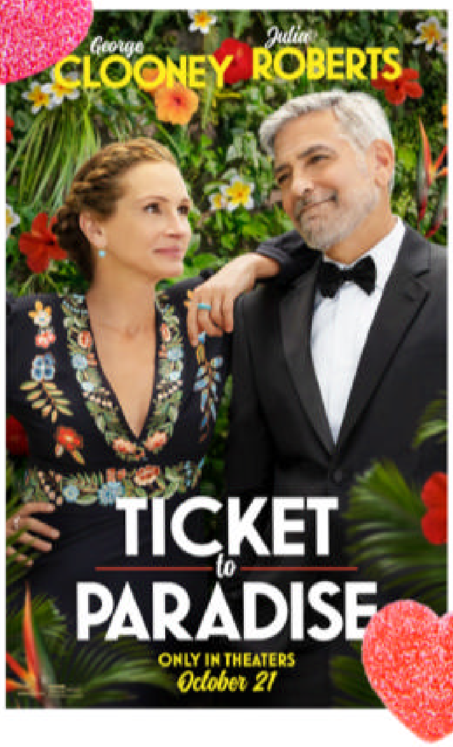
'Will this be just another way to capitalise on our emotions? Maybe, but you know what? Take my money'

So far, *Ticket To Paradise* and *The Lost City* have each made well over £100million at the box office, no doubt prompting Hollywood to fire up its romcom machine even more. Will this be just another way to capitalise on women's emotions and take advantage of our bank accounts? Maybe, but you know what? Take my money! I'm ready to ugly-cry like Meg in that one *When Harry Met Sally...* scene again!

Because watching film stars who are having a blast making sure we have a blast? Finally getting smart, funny, highly produced films that have meaning? Feeling seen and catered to by a notoriously male-oriented business? Getting some relief from the dumpster fire that is the news? Yes, yes, yes and yes. Exactly that. And then some.




FROM THE PRODUCER OF TRAINWRECK AND BRIDESMAIDS AND THE DIRECTOR OF FORGETTING SARAH MARSHALL
A ROMANTIC COMEDY THAT GIVES YOU ALL THE FEELS
BROS
THEATERS
EMBER 30



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PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH IS IN CINEMAS 3 FEBRUARY

Your questionable character crush is the window to your soul

They're supposed to be gross, so why are they so hot?

WORDS: HANNAH CHAMBERS

Tiny sunglasses. *The Masked Singer*. Shoes with separated toes. People these days are into some extremely questionable stuff. We can probably chalk a lot of this up to strange personal taste, but our collective infatuation with shouldn't-be-but-are-kinda-hot fictional characters is worth more than an eyebrow raise. Honestly, we *know* we shouldn't lust over them. And if we stopped thirsting, and started thinking about them as what they really are, we'd probably (maybe) be turned off. But that wouldn't be any fun, and besides, most of this lot have at least one redeeming quality, right? Right?

1. Your crush: Puss in Boots

The hat. The cape. The sexy Spanish accent. Three reasons an animated cat became the ideal dinner (and fancy dress) party date.

What it says about you: You're after someone with a tough exterior and a soft and sentimental side. Or maybe you just want someone to drink lattes with.

2. Your crush: Bane

Does the 'B' in 'BDSM' stand for 'Bane'? (Actually, we shouldn't joke about the mask. This villain's backstory is *brutal*.)

What it says about you: You (loudly) announce every time your phone battery hits 69%. There's legit nothing you can't turn into a sexual innuendo.

3. Your crush: The Incredible Hulk

He's a meathead but also the sort of guy who'd suggest watching *The Goldfinch* instead of *It Chapter Two* because he'd rather feel stuff than jump out of his seat.

What it says about you: As clichéd as it sounds, your affection for The Hulk means that you always look for the good in people (and/or mutants).

4. Your crush: Lucius Malfoy

He's Voldemort affiliated and basically bought his son's way on to the quidditch team. But, okay, that magic stick he's always handling is pretty sexy.

What it says about you: Anyone who's into Lucius is just confused. It's his hair you want, not his heart. Do some soul-searching/shopping in Boots and get back to us.

5. Your crush: Ursula

She might be full of greed and dark magic, but there's just something about that impressive red lip and Kris Jenner-esque hair.

What it says about you: You definitely went through a significant emo phase in school and probably still have a few My Chemical Romance graphic tees at your parents' house.

6. Your crush: Gomez Adams

He's an attorney who loves losing cases and bragging about being voted Least Likely To Succeed. He's also a famously passionate lover…

What it says about you: You're the friend people text when they want advice but secretly want permission to do The Bad Thing. You'll always suggest happy hour.

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Go with the FLO

The UK's new favourite girl group – and the Brits Rising Star winners – on going viral and big (we mean big) plans ahead

WORDS: EMILY GULLA

From left: Jorja Douglas, Stella Quaresma and Renée Downer

PHOTOGRAPHY: SHENELL KENNEDY

R&B pop trio FLO are a breath of fresh air. Bandmates and BFFs, Jorja Douglas, 21, Stella Quaresma, 21, and Renée Downer, 20, fill a Zoom call with giggles and inside jokes. The band gained traction on TikTok last year, but actually formed in 2019 when their now-manager put them together. Renée and Stella met at the Sylvia Young Theatre School, and the pair knew Jorja through social media. Their music has strong 90s vibes. As for the name? Jorja credits their muse, 'a random fluffy white cat who Renée called Flo'. They liked it and it stuck.

Who's your musical inspiration?
STELLA: Mine's Brandy.
RENÉE: Victoria Monét.
JORJA: Whitney Houston.

How would you describe your sound?
STELLA: Nostalgic… but like a modern-ish fusion. That's the music we love. We listen to what's around us, so it's a nice mix.

What might surprise fans about you?
JORJA: We're very much the people we present ourselves to be. We find it hard to be fake.

What has been your biggest 'pinch me' moment so far?
RENÉE: We have Brandy's number in our phone now. That's really cool. Speaking to people that you admire and grew up listening to is just the biggest thing ever.
JORJA: We met Kelly Rowland. That was another 'pinch me' moment. She just walked into our session.

How is life in the spotlight?
RENÉE: It's scary that life is changing so quickly. Knowing that you're not going to get the same amount of freedom, and invasion of privacy is scary.
JORJA: We can lean on each other. We're all going through the same thing.

If you had to characterise yourselves as Spice Girls, who would you be?
JORJA: I'm Scary Spice. Scary FLO. Renée is Goofy FLO, Organised FLO. Stella's Sarcastic FLO, Sleepy FLO.

> **'We're very much the people we present ourselves to be. We find it hard to be fake'**

Who's last to leave the dance floor on a night out?
JORJA: Stella *is* the dance floor. While I'm sleeping on the sofa.

What's the most important message you have for your followers?
RENÉE: Use your voice. You can do anything you want to do. Be bold.
JORJA: Be yourself.
STELLA: Trust yourself.
JORJA: No one's perfect.
STELLA: You've got this.
JORJA: [Laughs] This is us to the mirror every morning.

What's your ultimate career goal?
RENÉE: We have lots. I don't feel like there's an ultimate. Headlining Coachella, winning a Grammy, working with the people we love. There are so many little things that are massive.
JORJA: FLOchella!

FLO's debut headline show is at London's The Outernet on 30 March. Follow them on Instagram @flolikethis

Hello, You

We caught up with the new faces joining Joe Goldberg in season 4

WORDS: DUSTY BAXTER-WRIGHT

02
03
01
04
05

Who's next? The cast of potential new victims...

Penn Badgley is back as Joe, and this time he's been let loose on London. While he's reinvented himself as Professor Jonathan Moore, a university lecturer, his extracurricular activities are as dark as ever. Introducing his potential new victims, in their own words.

1 Nadia

Who? Amy-Leigh Hickman plays Nadia, one of Jonathan's adoring literature students in his new university role.
In a nutshell: 'Nadia admires and looks up to Jonathan – their relationship is fun and she isn't afraid to have a joke with him from time to time. He's in a completely new environment, [which] puts him in a more vulnerable position.'
Anything else we should know? Amy's first role was in *Tracy Beaker Returns*, and later, *EastEnders*. She's a massive *You* fan – she watched every season in a couple of days.

2 Blessing

Who? A post-grad Nigerian princess and crypto-currency trader, played by newcomer Ozioma Whenu.
In a nutshell: 'She aligns herself with people who make her more interesting. Jonathan is an enigma, and she can't quite figure him out. She's intrigued by his mystery and intelligence, but she can smell the lack of status a mile off.'
Anything else we should know? Er, murder is likely. As Ozioma puts it, 'This group of people are the most deserving crowd.'

3 Kate

Who? Charlotte Ritchie from *Call The Midwife* and *Fresh Meat* transforms into Kate, an art gallery director with a cool exterior.
In a nutshell: 'Kate is very strong-willed and loyal. She can be pretty nasty, but as the series progresses we see her softer side.'
Anything else we should know? Kate's coldness sets her apart from the group – but Jonathan might work his magic. 'She's more guarded and icy than the other characters. She doesn't trust him at all, and calls him a dubious character from the off. Sadly that doesn't last...'

> **'Adam and Joe both have a lot of secrets'**
>
> **- Lukas Gage**

4 Adam

Who? A wealthy expat American, failing to meet his family's high expectations. Lady Phoebe's boyfriend, played by *The White Lotus* and *Euphoria*'s Lukas Gage.
In a nutshell: 'You can't put Adam in a box. He's complicated and deeply aware of people, and it makes him a bit tormented. He's the only other American that Joe can bond with. They both have a lot of secrets.'
Anything else we should know? Lukas relocated to London for the show. 'I was knackered! And I [now] miss all my British friends.'

5 Lady Phoebe

Who? London's answer to Paris Hilton, played by *EastEnders*' Tilly Keeper.
In a nutshell: 'She's an aristocratic socialite, born into a world of privilege, old money and fame. Phoebe is generous to a fault and wears her heart on her sleeve. A lonely individual seeking a true connection.'
Anything else we should know? Tilly and Amy-Leigh were on FaceTime to each other when they realised they'd been booked for the show. 'We went out to dinner that night to celebrate.'

YOU SEASON 4 PART 1 IS ON NETFLIX 9 FEBRUARY. PART 2 IS RELEASED 9 MARCH

PHOTOGRAPHY: NETFLIX

Books heading for the big screen

Read these bestsellers before they're turned into TV or films, so you can be *that* friend who says, 'the book was better'

WORDS: KIERA EGAN

DAISY JONES & THE SIX

Taylor Jenkins Reid

The book: Daisy Jones is a singer on her way to stardom when she joins up-and-coming rock band The Six. Stars align and sparks fly with leading frontman Billy.

The adaptation: With Suki Waterhouse taking on Daisy, and Sam Claflin as Billy, the chemistry is palpable. Out 3 March on Prime Video.

THE BALLAD OF SONGBIRDS AND SNAKES

Suzanne Collins

The book: This prequel to *The Hunger Games* follows 18-year-old Coriolanus Snow as he mentors District 12's female tribute on the hunt for glory.

The adaptation: Get ready to be transported back to the Capitol, with Hunter Schafer and Rachel Zegler at the helm of this Hollywood blockbuster. In cinemas 17 November.

THE COLOR PURPLE

Alice Walker

The book: This iconic 1982 novel tells the story of an African American woman's life-long struggles of living in the South during the early 1900s.

The adaptation: Oprah and Steven Spielberg are reinventing the story as a musical film, with an incredible cast including Taraji P. Henson, Halle Bailey, Danielle Brooks and H.E.R. In cinemas 20 December.

DUNE

Frank Herbert

The book: Didn't read the novel in time for the first film? Not to worry. *Dune: Part Two* is also based on the first book in the *Dune* series, a sci-fi novel set on the desert planet Arrakis.

The adaptation: Florence Pugh and Austin Butler join Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya in the complex and impressive franchise. In cinemas 3 November.

RED, WHITE & ROYAL BLUE

Casey McQuiston

The book: A TikTok hit LGBTQ+ romance novel about the steamy pairing between the US president's son and the fictional Prince of Wales. (No, not William.)

The adaptation: We'll be watching for the plot. And, erm, by plot we mean Nicholas Galitzine and Taylor Zakhar Perez. Prepare to swoon. Out late 2023 on Prime Video.

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Perfectil
avant
REN
Kate Somerville
EviDenS
Milk
SHISEIDO

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PHOTOGRAPHY: BELL & BLOOD STUDIO. WORDS: LUCIE RUTTER

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glow

Ayurveda for the uninitiated

The 3,000-year-old science is 'new' again, and it's got some very modern surprises

WORDS: LAUREN BALSAMO

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAMIEN FRY. SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE FOUR SEASONS RESORT NEVIS. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: TRACY ALFAJORA. MODEL: DARYA JEMELJANOVIĆ. SWIMSUIT, ANEMOS (WORN THROUGHOUT)

Let's start with what Ayurveda is not. Despite what your feed may tell you, it's not a trend, it's not a fad and it's definitely not a novel idea. What it actually is: an ancient science, specifically the science of life (in Sanskrit, 'ayur' means 'life' or 'vital power' and 'veda' means 'science' or 'knowledge'), that's been studied and practised in Indian culture for millennia. 'Ayurveda is a holistic way of looking at life that's now being more widely recognised and practised in the western world, especially in the beauty space,' says dermatologist Kiran Mian. Some tenets: your outer beauty is a mirror for what's going on internally, encouraging you to look deeper and treat issues such as breakouts or rashes not just at the surface, but also at the root, where triggers such as seasonal changes, diet or the constant stress of today's world can create imbalances in your system. 'When someone comes to me with acne, I'll write them a prescription, but I'll also help them adjust their daily habits to help reduce inflammation,' Dr Mian says.

But you don't need to go to a derm to do some Ayurvedic exploration – Sephora's coolest new brands (the likes of Ranavat and Fable & Mane) are based on holistic principles, while traditional Ayurvedic herbs and plant-derived ingredients such as turmeric, bakuchiol, gotu kola, rose water and ashwagandha are quickly becoming mainstays. In a few years, the Ayurvedic beauty market is expected to be valued at a whopping £13bn globally.

'I believe that Ayurvedic beauty is becoming more mainstream in western culture because we're starting to, through these times of global health crisis, return to nature for health, healing and beauty,' says Ananta Ripa Ajmera, a yoga instructor, spiritual teacher and adviser of wellness retreat Ayurveda at The Well. Wellness-focused beauty has been a thing for years now, of course, but the cultural component hasn't been talked about as much, says Michelle Ranavat, founder and CEO of skin and haircare brand Ranavat. 'Now the two things are coming together – you're really getting the full picture.'

How does this play out in your products? Balance. Turmeric, for example, is now being combined with retinol in topical medications to help temper some of retinol's potentially irritating side effects. For those experiencing hair loss or hair thinning, Dr Mian encourages patients to combine daily Regaine treatment with weekly or biweekly hair oiling, a major Ayurvedic practice (see below) that involves massaging both your scalp and hair strands with a nourishing oil. 'Regaine's main ingredient, minoxidil, works to dilate blood vessels and stimulate blood flow to the scalp, and that's essentially what hair oiling does with the massaging,' says Dr Mian.

In a few years, the Ayurvedic beauty market is expected to be valued at a whopping £13bn globally

Every expert we spoke to for this piece said they want to share Ayurveda with the world. The brands on these pages make that possible. Each is inspired by different Ayurvedic philosophies and practices, and can help with everything from acne to split ends. 'I always try to make it clear: Ayurveda isn't just for Indian people or people who grew up practising it,' says Ranavat. 'It's the same thing with these beauty secrets and products: they're meant for everyone.'

For your hair and scalp

>

A hair-oiling duo

Mauli Rituals co-founder Anita Kaushal uses this set as an overnight treatment.

Mauli Rituals Grow Strong Hair Oil and Detangling Neem Comb, £44 for 30ml

A shine-boosting spray

Shake and spritz this oil-based mist on dry hair for instant softness and UV protection.

Fable & Mane HoliRoots Hibiscus Hydrating Hair Oil Mist, £26

For your masking routine

A softening cream mask

A finely milled powder that sloughs away dead skin cells and soothes, thanks to aloe vera.

Vedayush
Face Ubtan Exfoliating
Face Mask, £32

A purifying clay mask

Created in partnership with dermatologist and Ayurvedic practitioner Raja Sivamani, this is a must for oily skin.

Codex Labs
Shaant Balancing
Clay Mask, £31

Sahajan Golden Milk Cleanser, £41; Avya Hydroveda Serum, £60

For your face

>

A nourishing serum

An intense hydrator inspired by the ritual of Ushapana – the first drink of water early in the morning.

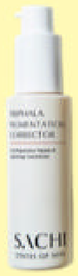
Forest Essentials Rasa First Activating Serum, £45

A gentle cleanser

Powerful Ayurvedic botanicals such as jasmine and lotus cleanse and purify skin at the same time.

Samaya Hydrating Cleanser Pitta, £59

For your next DIY facial



A brightening face oil

A cocktail of niacinamide, ancient super fruits and antioxidants to even skin tone.

Sachi States of Skin Triphala Pigment Corrector, £69

A facial massage wand

The tip of this wand is made of kansa, a blend of copper and tin prized for its ability to help soothe and de-puff skin.

Ranavat Kansa Wand Detoxifying Facial Massage Tool, £70

NÃO AYURVE
AYURVEDIC SKINCA
Pitta · Cooling Body O
UMA
PURE CALM
WELLNESS
BATH OIL

Nao Ayurveda Pitta Cooling Body Oil, £40; Uma Pure Calm Wellness Bath Oil, £80

For your body

A relaxing bath oil

Pour it in your tub or rub it on your body and let the blend of sandalwood, jasmine and camomile essential oils help you unwind.

Uma Pure Calm Wellness Bath Oil, £80

A soothing body oil

Sandalwood and lavender combine to transport you to a sacred spa after a stressful day.

Urban Veda Calming Ayurvedic Body Oil, £35

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You're about to see Tula Skincare everywhere

Meet the gastroenterologist doctor turned skincare founder

WORDS: LIA MAPPOURA

When I sit down to talk all things skincare with Dr Roshini Raj, founder of Tula, over Zoom, she immediately references her office, where she practices gastroenterology. Wearing a white lab coat, ready for a day of treating patients with internal digestive issues, Dr Raj explains how studying this field for more than 20 years was the inspiration behind the idea for her skincare brand.

'One of the things that I discovered in my training was this whole idea of probiotics and how not all bacteria are bad – some are actually not only good, but vital for our functioning,' she tells me. After seeing her patients embracing probiotics in their diet, leading to improvements with their skin, Dr Raj had a light bulb moment. 'No one was really talking about this connection between the gut and the skin,' she explains.

Despite launching in the United States in 2014, Tula only hit our shores towards the end of 2022. It boasts an extensive line-up of cleansers, treatments, eye creams and serums – all of which are targeted at specific skin concerns, such as blackheads, dryness and dull complexions.

As well as probiotics, the ingredients that Tula harvests (which include prebiotics and superfoods) are thoroughly thought-out to provide a balancing effect on the skin. And a defining brand principle is the intersection between beauty and wellness.

As for its name, Dr Raj tells me that Tula, in fact, means 'balance' in Sanskrit. 'I thought this was a great way to reach people no matter where they were and introduce this whole idea of inner and outer wellness, as well as balance.'

Founder Dr Raj discovered a link between gut health and skin

TULA SKINCARE
probiotics & superfoods

Wrinkle Treatment Drops Retinol Alternative Serum, £58

TULA SKINCARE
glow & get it
cooling & brightening eye balm
baume regard rafraîchissant & illuminateur
robiotics & superfoods

Glow & Get It Cooling & Brightening Eye Balm, £26

THE BRAND AT A GLANCE

What it is
Formulated with probiotics and superfoods for all skin concerns.

Where to buy it
At tulaskincare.co.uk or from Space NK.

What it costs
From £10 minis to £77 maxis.

Must-try picks
The Beauty Sleep Overnight Repair Treatment, £59, is Dr Raj's fave, and the gentle Purifying Face Cleanser (right), £29, is a bestseller.

Beauty Lab

Deep hydration moisturisers

Each month, our beauty team tests the newest products. Here, beauty director Victoria Jowett searches for the very best dry skin soothers

1

SAND & SKY
Australian Glow Berries
+3% Vitamin C +Squalane
Intense Glow Moisturiser
Hydratant éclat intense
Net Wt. 60 g / ℮ 2.12 oz. US

2

EAU THERMALE
Avène
LABORATOIRE DERMATOLOGIQUE
TOLERANCE
HYDRA-10
CRÈME HYDRATANTE
HYDRATING CREAM
For dry to very dry sensitive skin
40 ml ℮ 1.3 fl.oz.
COSMOPOLITAN
LOVES
UK 2023

3

STRESS
FACE

4

THE INKEY LIST
SUPERSOLUTIONS
10% UREA MOISTURIZER

5

calm & soothe
cream whip moisturiser
crème hydratante
infused with
hemp & jojoba

6

MOLECULAR BARRIER RECOVERY CREAM BALM
ALLIES of SKIN

1. SAND & SKY AUSTRALIAN GLOW BERRIES INTENSE GLOW MOISTURISER, £43.90
The vegan squalane in this cream gives an instant hydration hit. But the fun doesn't stop there – what's clever about this formula is that it's also loaded with vitamin C, which brightens and helps plump up the skin. It leaves a light layer on the surface of your skin, which creates a barrier against moisture loss, making it ideal for stubbornly dry, dull skin.

2. AVÈNE TOLERANCE HYDRA-10 HYDRATING CREAM, £18
If (like me) your skin can be a tad dramatic and stresses out over *everything* – from a slight change in the weather to a milky latte, then this is for you. Made with just 10 ingredients (there are no preservatives or fragrances), it's designed to deeply soothe and hydrate sensitised complexions. The hyaluronic acid and thermal spring water act like a comfort blanket on angry skin.

3. STRESS FAACE MOISTURISER, £34
Please can we take a moment to appreciate the beauty that is this packaging? Well, it's not just a pretty pot. The formula is just as wonderful. First, the texture – it's rich thanks to the nourishing marula oil, but has been whipped to give it a lightness that doesn't feel too claggy on the skin. Japanese rice bran oil gives hydration for days, while niacinamide helps even out tone and strengthen a weakened skin barrier.

4. THE INKEY LIST 10% UREA MOISTURIZER, £18.99
Yes, the packaging is no frills, but this is a solid moisturiser that works on all (yes, I repeat, all) skin types. Created in partnership with dermatologists, whether you're prone to acne or dealing with a skin condition such as eczema or psoriasis, the urea in this delivers hydration and gently exfoliates. Colloidal oat acts like a soothing salve for red and irritated skin, making this cream an all-round crowd pleaser.

5. GLOW HUB CALM & SOOTHE CREAM WHIP MOISTURISER, £11
For just over a tenner, I'm impressed. Yes, the formula isn't quite as nourishing as some of the other moisturisers on this page, but it's cooling, lightweight and gives an instant supple feeling to tight, parched complexions. It works best as a daily moisturiser, refreshing and plumping the skin – it doesn't claim to be a make-up primer, but I noticed my foundation looked smoother and lasted longer after using it as a base.

6. ALLIES OF SKIN MOLECULAR BARRIER RECOVERY CREAM BALM, £86
I know what you're thinking, this is a serious investment. But Allies of Skin is famous for the quality of its skincare ingredients, and this cream is no exception. Loaded with rich ceramides to boost moisture retention and deeply hydrate, oat proteins to strengthen the skin barrier and black cumin oil to improve the appearance of fine lines. This cream is so powerful, it's being hailed a 'bandage balm'.

Decode your cream

What to look for in a moisturiser – according to dermatologists

The power players

'Humectants, such as hyaluronic acid, urea and glycerin work like hydration magnets, pulling moisture from the deep layers of the skin and binding them in the outermost layer,' says Dr Derrick Phillips, dermatologist at OneWelbeck Skin Health & Allergy.

Approach with caution

Oily, acne-prone skin? 'Using products that block pores can worsen acne. Don't use greasy moisturisers with ingredients such as paraffin, petroleum jelly or beeswax,' says Dr Ben Esdaile, dermatologist at Skin & Me. Opt for gel or water-based creams.

A crowd-pleaser

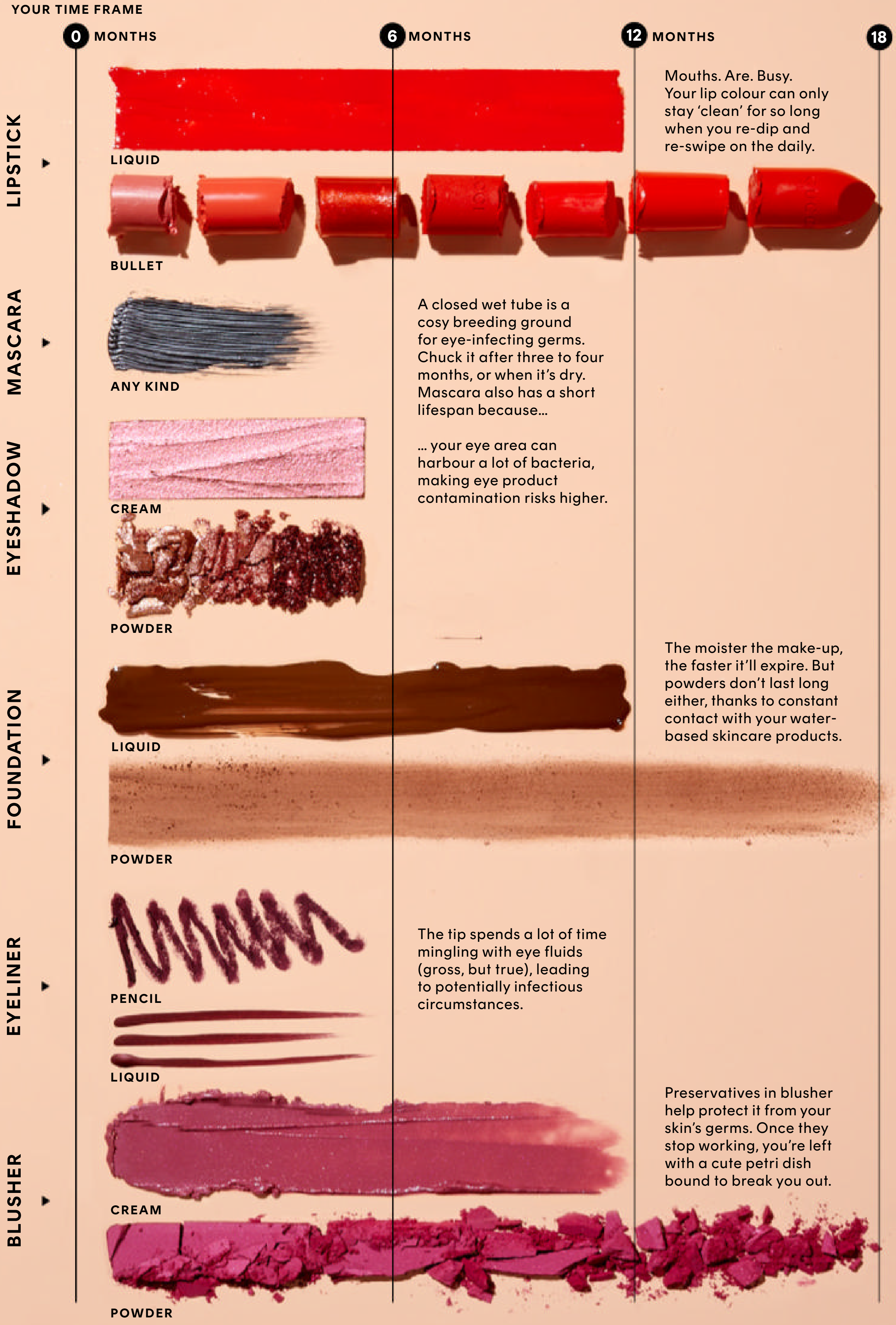
Look for niacinamide on the ingredient list. 'It has a wide range of benefits for the skin, from balancing oil production and reducing inflammation to helping even out skin-tone imbalance. It helps those with eczema as it supports the skin barrier, boosts hydration and is anti-inflammatory,' says Dr Mary Sommerlad, dermatologist at Dermatica.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

So this is how long you can *actually* keep your make-up

We're all trying to buy less, but how long before your beauty buys become legit biohazards? Cosmetic chemist Ron Robinson has the (brutal) answers

WORDS: CHLOE METZGER



Mouths. Are. Busy. Your lip colour can only stay 'clean' for so long when you re-dip and re-swipe on the daily.

A closed wet tube is a cosy breeding ground for eye-infecting germs. Chuck it after three to four months, or when it's dry. Mascara also has a short lifespan because...

... your eye area can harbour a lot of bacteria, making eye product contamination risks higher.

The moister the make-up, the faster it'll expire. But powders don't last long either, thanks to constant contact with your water-based skincare products.

The tip spends a lot of time mingling with eye fluids (gross, but true), leading to potentially infectious circumstances.

Preservatives in blusher help protect it from your skin's germs. Once they stop working, you're left with a cute petri dish bound to break you out.

Heads up

01. Storing your make-up in the bathroom is a big no. Heat and humidity can lead to faster bacteria growth, shortening expiration dates even more. Instead, leave it in a dry place, such as your bedroom.

02. Don't mess with your eye area. Ensure your shadows are stored in a cool, dry place and be sure to thoroughly clean and disinfect make-up brushes once a week.

03. Both pencil and gel liners can harden from exposure to air. Use a clean sharpener (as in soap-and-water-scrub-scrub-scrub clean) once a week to keep them lining like new.

PSA! These rules don't apply to 'green' make-up, which is made without traditional preservatives. Take the expiration dates on the packaging seriously, okay?

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFFREY WESTBROOK/STUDIO D

Quick question: do you really need bond-building haircare?

Quick answer: yes

WORDS: LAUREN BALSAMO

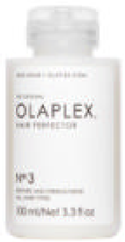
First, a little anatomy lesson: each one of your hair strands is made up of tiny bonds that are largely responsible for its shape, strength and shine. Chemical processing and frequent heat styling can damage these bonds, leading to just about every annoying hair issue, from colour fading to split ends to hair thinning.

That's why bond-building haircare is so very necessary. The exact science varies from product to product, but in general, most formulas penetrate the hair shaft to repair broken bonds by either replacing lost protein with amino acids or using acids to alter your hair's pH, says trichologist and The Inkey List brand ambassador Shab Reslan.

'My clients who use bonding products have hair that better retains moisture, so there's less frizz and breakage – plus, their colour looks more vibrant and stays that way for longer, too,' adds celebrity colourist and Matrix brand ambassador Rachel Bodt.

TL;DR: this is a relatively simple way to get healthier, easier-to-style hair. And because so many product options are out there right now, there are a ton of different ways – from pre-washes to leave-ins – you can get in on the goodness, starting with these standouts.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



THE BELOVED OG

Stylists are obsessed with Olaplex – the brand that started it all – because it makes all hair types and textures shinier, softer and significantly stronger.

Olaplex Nº.3 Hair Perfector, £28

THE AFFORDABLE ONE

This is a multitasking hero: it functions as a detangler, conditioner, frizz fighter and bond-builder… all for the price of a takeaway pizza.

Andrew Fitzsimons AF1 Restructuring 10-in-1 Leave-In Conditioner, £11

THE PRE-WASH PICK

A weekly date with this intensive treatment mask is like hitting the reset button on dull, lifeless hair. You'll notice a difference after the first use.

Redken Acidic Bonding Concentrate Intensive Pre-Treatment, £21.50

THE MIST-ON OPTION

Not only does this spray create strong, healthy bonds with amino acids and peptides, but it helps prevent breakage while you're styling, too.

Goldwell BondPro+ Repair & Structure Spray, £15.10

THE LEAVE-IN MASK

Unlike most masks that you use in the shower, this one goes on clean, damp hair once you're out. The no-rinse formula takes just four minutes to activate.

K18 Leave-In Molecular Repair Hair Mask, £55

THE PROTECTOR

A must for hot-tool users, this lotion shields hair from up to 230°C of heat while rebuilding broken bonds within the hair shaft.

Living Proof Triple Bond Complex, £42

Shopping basket saviour: our insider's guide to budget beauty

From James Welsh's online shopping hack to drugstore must-haves from Molly-Mae's make-up artist

If you're a beauty obsessive whose FYP is full of make-up reviews, you'll know that opening TikTok is not only dangerous for your screen time, but also your bank account. While there are few things that bring greater joy than scrolling Sephora/Cult Beauty/Lookfantastic, with so much on our wish lists, we need to be a little savvier.

Beauty products are more expensive than ever, but with more brands and formulas at our disposal, your money will go further once you've finished reading these words.

This is where our experts come in – here to share their best budget shopping tips, along with their favourite affordable products. Think of them as beauty's version of The Avengers, minus the spandex costumes. Which I guess makes me Tony Stark…

Like the real Avengers, my army of experts is nothing but elite. There are MUAs to the stars, including Hannah Martin, and even internet icons such as James Welsh – plus many more.

So, buckle up as we get into our pros' guide to beauty shopping on a budget.

Adam Reed, celebrity hairstylist, founder of Arkive Headcare

'I always recommend shopping the three-for-two offers and stocking up on your favourite products to get the most of the promotion.'

Adam's go-to bargain hair products:
Arkive All Together Now Co-Cleanse, £13. 'This can be used in place of your shampoo and conditioner. It's designed to work with your natural hair.'

James Welsh, skincare YouTuber and reviewer

'My best budget skincare shopping tip is to sign up to your favourite beauty website, add your products to your online shopping basket, but don't check out. Usually, within 24 hours the website will email you a discount code to use at checkout.'

James's go-to bargain skincare products:
COSRX Acne Pimple Master Patch, £5.99 for 24. 'With so many acne patches on the market, COSRX's are the only ones that really get the job done for me, flattening spots overnight, reducing redness and protecting.'

Rose Gallagher, make-up artist and beauty content creator

'When allocating your budget, rank your products in order of surface area and usage. Your foundation, for example, covers the largest area of your face and is probably an everyday staple. This is where more of your budget needs to go, rather than on a bright lipstick that might see an outing every three weeks. Invest in the things you'll use most and keep impulsive moments for your least-splurged-upon items.'

Rose's go-to products:
The Inkey List Redness Relief Solution 10% Azelaic Acid, £15.99. 'As someone with two different types of rosacea, I can't tell you how key it is that The Inkey List has released a 10% azelaic acid at such an affordable price.'

Stefan Bertin, celebrity hairstylist

'I'd say 80% of people use too much conditioner and the other 20% are applying it to the whole length of their hair, rather than focusing on the ends. Being aware of how much product you're using will save you cash over time.'

Stefan's go-to bargain hair products:
Aussie 3 Minute Miracle Moisture Deep Treatment, £4.99. 'An icon. A legend. It's super-nourishing without being crazy heavy and it works well on all hair types.'

Dr Sam Bunting, cosmetic dermatologist

'Stop wasting money on redundant categories. There's simply no need for a specific product for your neck – your facial care is perfectly fine for this region. Likewise, cellulite cream doesn't work (no topical product will). Be cautious of marketing hype.'

Dr Bunting's go-to bargain skin product:
Eucerin UreaRepair Plus Urea Shower Foam, £11. 'Body cleansing is an area where you can make huge savings. The goal with cleansing is to do no harm. I'm a huge fan of Eucerin, as it's a great brand for dry skin. This is one of the best gentle cleansers on the market.'

Dr Anjali Mahto, consultant dermatologist

'When it comes to skincare actives – think: retinol, salicylic acid, l-ascorbic acid – have a look at where they lie on the product's ingredient list. The higher up the list, the higher their concentration in the formula. High-street skincare formulas have come a long way and often have the same levels of active ingredients as their luxury counterparts, meaning that there's no need to spend a fortune on skincare.'

Dr Mahto's go-to bargain skincare product:
Garnier SkinActive Micellar Cleansing Water All-in-1, £7.99. 'I recommend this to all my patients who wear make-up. It's an excellent make-up remover that's been very well formulated. Pretty much all skin types can use this product.'

Hollie Flynn, celebrity make-up artist

'When shopping for make-up on a budget, look for multi-use products: cream blushers that can be used as a lip tint, bronzers that can also be used as eyeshadow and lip liners that can double up as eyeliner.'

Hollie's go-to bargain make-up products:
Morphe Colour Pencils, £6. 'These are super-pigmented, sharpen very easily and work for lip liner, faux freckles and eyeliner.'

She's Molly-Mae's MUA – so, if it's good enough for Molly…

Dr Ifeoma Ejikeme, consultant dermatologist

'Know where to splurge and where to save. Your cleanser, moisturiser and sunscreen do not need to cost the earth to get great results. Look out for promotions and, when you see them, stock up on your basics, such as SPF. Save the splurges for your actives, such as serums, where a little goes a long way.'

Dr Ejikeme's go-to skincare product: Eucerin Sensitive Protect Dry Touch Sun Gel-Cream 50+, £19.50. 'An SPF50 that blends to all skin types and leaves a matte finish.'

Hannah Martin, make-up artist

'Thankfully, the internet is awash with advice about great high-street make-up. YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are full of videos where people share their budget favourites, so my advice is to always do your research before you shop. But don't buy something just because it's gone viral. It may not be too expensive, but if you never end up using it, it's still a waste of your money.'

Hannah's go-to bargain make-up products: Lottie London Diamond Bounce in Rose Gold, £8.95. 'It's just so pretty. There are other multipurpose shimmers on the market that are (a) smaller and (b) significantly more expensive but don't glimmer half as much. You can use it anywhere, on the eyes, cheeks, lips, shoulders or décolletage.'

Andrew Fitzsimons, celebrity hairstylist

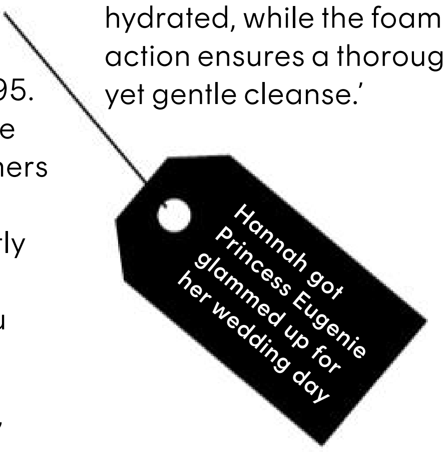
'It's important to look at the ingredients in your haircare products rather than the brand name. Buying products that are formulated with good-for-hair ceramides, castor oil and coconut oil will help keep your scalp and strands healthy.'

Andrew's go-to bargain hair product: Andrew Fitzsimons Restructuring 10-in-1 Leave-In Conditioner, £11. 'This retails for just £11, but provides 10 benefits in one, including heat and UV protection, detangling and shine-boosting.'

Dr Alexis Granite, consultant dermatologist

'Keep it simple. You don't need a million steps for an effective skincare routine. Check out brands such as CeraVe, Avène and La Roche-Posay for products that work at a great price.'

Dr Granite's go-to bargain skincare product: CeraVe Hydrating Cream-to-Foam Cleanser, £12.50. 'This is the best of both worlds. The creamy base keeps the skin well hydrated, while the foaming action ensures a thorough yet gentle cleanse.'



Hannah got Princess Eugenie glammed up for her wedding day

Adeola Gboyega, make-up artist

'You don't always need a separate foundation and concealer. Concealers tend to have more coverage than a foundation, so you can either spot conceal for a natural face or mix it with a serum or moisturiser instead.'

Adeola's go-to bargain make-up product: Maybelline Instant Anti-Age Perfector 4-in-1 Glow, £12.99. 'This primes, conceals and evens out skin tone.'

Dr Shaaira Nasir, consultant dermatologist

'Remember that expensive doesn't mean better. Get to know your skin type and what the main focus is that you are trying to treat. Only then can you select your products.'

Dr Nasir's go-to bargain skincare product: Altruist Sunscreen SPF50, £4.75. 'It's super-affordable, comes in a face fluid and also a green tinted version for those with rosacea.'

Jules Von Hep, founder of Isle of Paradise

'No pre-tan scrub? Don't panic. Grab some brown sugar and a tablespoon of body wash, mix in a bowl and exfoliate your skin before tanning.'

Jules's go-to bargain tan product: The Body Shop Almond Milk Body Yogurt, £12. 'It's ideal for mixing self-tan drops.'

Adam Burrell, make-up artist

'You might see 50-step make-up tutorials with different products all layered, but you can save time and money by simplifying the process. Instead of using an eye primer and several eyeshadows, just use one cream eyeshadow. Cream shadows are so easy to apply and you get an instant, bold finish without the mess. For cheeks, do you really need the contour, the highlight, the cream and powder blush on top? Just use a warm bronzer and apply it as a contour/bronze/blush hybrid. When applying, smile and apply to the apples of the cheeks, blending it back towards the ear and then dusting it where you'd naturally catch the sun.'

Adam's go-to bargain make-up product: Barry M Black Bold Waterproof Eyeliner, £3.99. 'This has been a kit staple of mine for years. It's jet black, glides on and blends easily.'

Katie Jane Hughes, make-up artist

'Instead of buying a primer, use your skincare. I switch up my SPF depending on what kind of finish I want. So if I want a dewy finish, I use a hydrating formula, which gives my skin a glow.'

Katie's go-to bargain make-up product: NYX Professional Makeup Jumbo Eye Pencil, £5.50. 'The NYX eyeliners are amazing because there are multiple shapes, sizes and colours, and my followers also love them.'

WORDS: LAURA CAPON. PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

Zola Ganzorigt, nail artist

She's the creator of Hailey Bieber's glazed doughnut nails

'To help your DIY manicure last longer, add another layer of top coat the day after. Using cuticle oil every day will also help extend wear time and keep your polish looking shiny and fresh.'

Zola's go-to bargain nail product:
MeAmora Nail On in Headliner, £12. 'If you're going to an event, instead of going to the salon, use press-ons, as they're faster and cheaper.'

Nick Gilbert, fragrance expert

'Follow your nose and trust what it's telling you about the scent you're smelling. In fragrance, price isn't everything. Yes, more expensive fragrances often have more expensive materials. But the key thing to remember is the artistry of the perfumer means that even less expensive materials can be used beautifully. And it's often the same perfumers creating both super-luxe and more affordable fragrances. Keep an open nose and you'll find that gorgeous scents can be found at all price points.

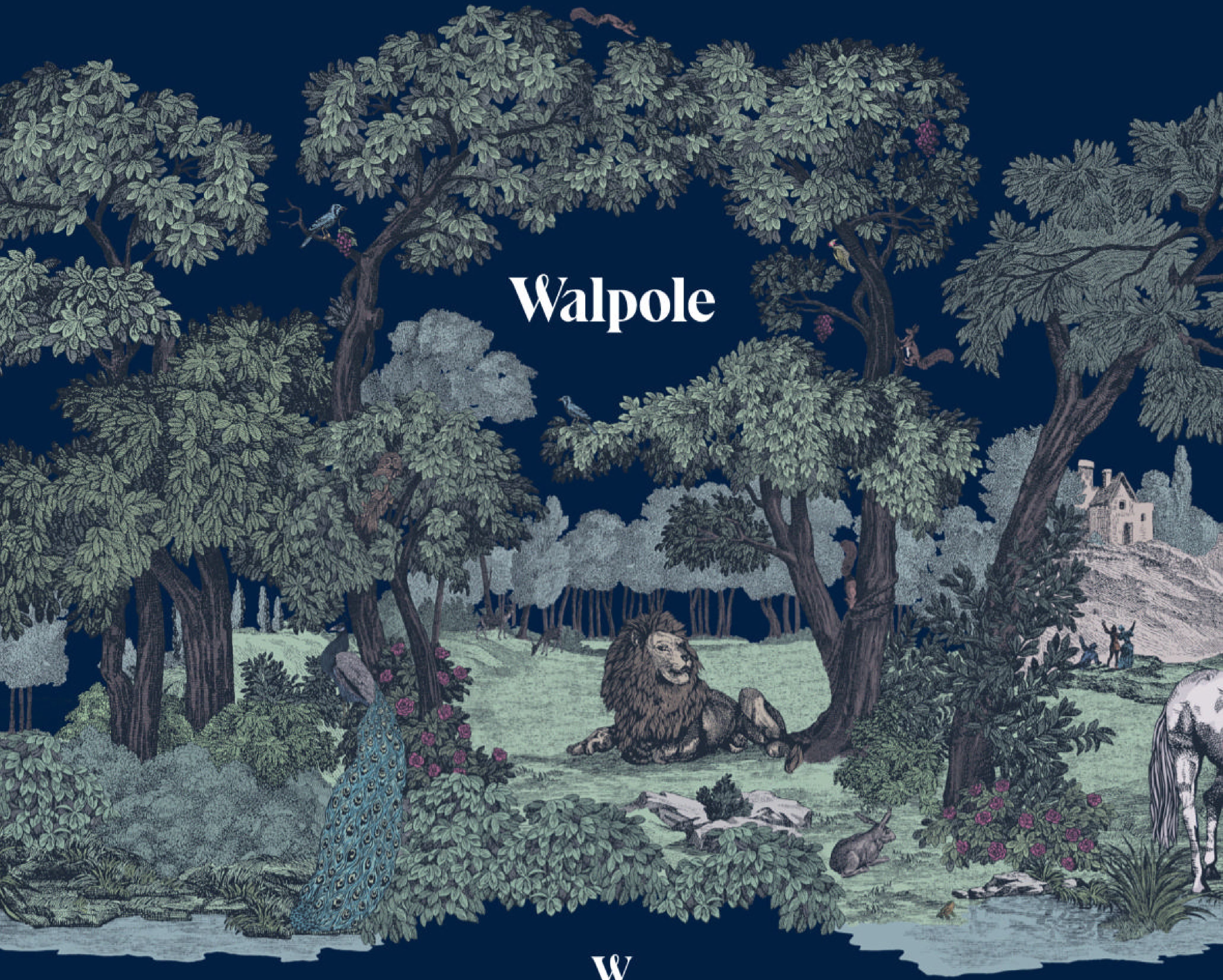
Nick's go-to bargain fragrance:
So…? Unique Sweet Amber Body Mist, £5.99. 'A rich, warm, resinous body mist.'

Cigdem Kemal Yilmaz, skincare formulator and founder of Skin Masterclass

'I'd highly recommend an ingredients-focused approach. Look for multi-functional products with a blend of beneficial ingredients, such as hyaluronic acid and peptides, to target an array of skin concerns. You'll get more bang for your buck than in single-ingredient formulations.'

Cigdem's go-to bargain skincare product:
The Ordinary Multi-Peptide + HA Serum, £14.30. 'I love this powerful serum, which is formulated with an array of advanced anti-ageing ingredients, including hyaluronic acid, amino acids and a blend of peptides.'

Walpole



W

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ILLUSTRATION BY COLE & SON

Crystals to save your 2023 **Page 42**

Meet buzz brand Miaou **Page 44**

Your GRWM feed needs an update **Page 45**

Does your bra *actually* fit? **Page 46**

style

VULNERABILITY IS UNIVERSAL
Empathy
Empathy

The fashion brands serving looks and giving back

For these designers, caring about your wellbeing isn't a trend – it's what they're all about

WORDS: TARAH-LYNN SAINT-ELIEN, ANDREA ZENDEJAS AND MADDY ALFORD

The Mayfair Group

themayfairgroupllc.com

'The Empathy Always collection has become one of our most iconic staples,' says Mayfair Group founder Sam Abrahart. 'It sends a powerful message and is a great reminder for anyone who wears or sees it.' Mayfair's seriousness about its mission to help spread awareness and destigmatise mental health hasn't lessened any sense of fun in its designs, though – if anything, it fuels it. And that's made this brand a bona-fide celeb fave. Tracksuits featuring phrases such as 'your emotions are valid' and doodled-on jumpers have been spotted on everyone from Jennifer Lopez to Bella Hadid. The good vibes extend beyond the clothes, too. Last year, Mayfair launched a therapy fund in partnership with MyWellbeing, a mental health organisation that matches people with therapists.

Just Be Fucking Kind

Jumper, £94,
The Mayfair Group

YOU ARE INSPIRING PEOPLE WHO
You Don't Even Know

Jumper, £94,
The Mayfair Group

mental health matters

Happiness Project

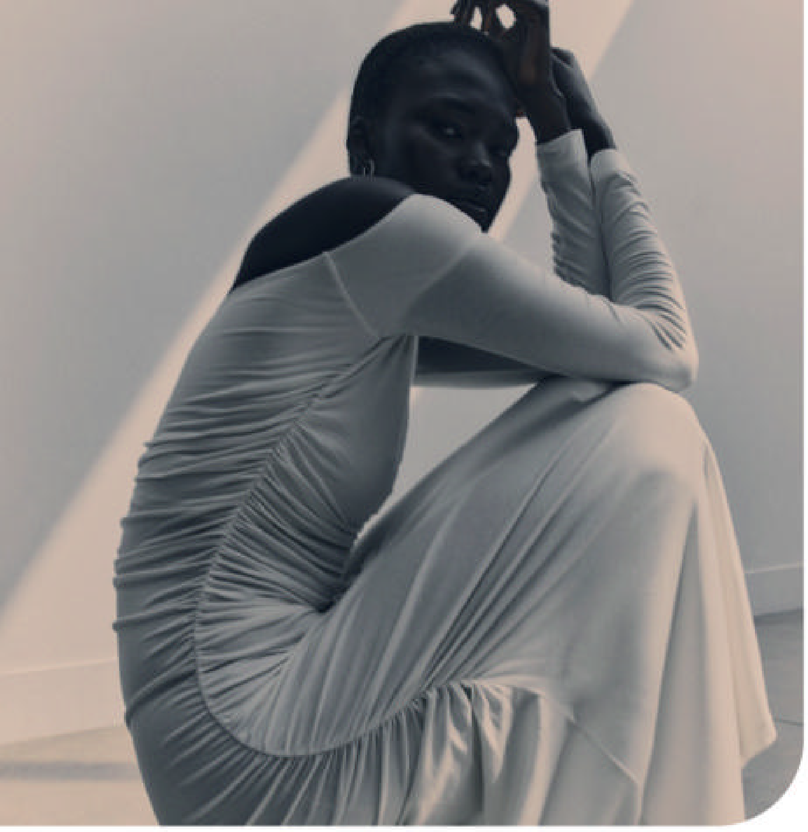
happinessproject.com

From graphic tees to a collab with Toms, Happiness Project's lines of clothing and accessories are almost *always* adorned with design details like mood-boosting smiley faces or cheery tie-dye. Founder Jake Lavin was inspired to create the optimism-infused brand after tragically losing a school classmate to suicide. Since then, Lavin has tried to educate as many people as possible about mental health. 'The more the world is educated, the more we can work together to save lives and help those suffering,' he says. Happiness Project donates 15% of profits to suicide prevention causes.

mental health matters

T-shirt, around £25,
Happiness Project

Hoodie, around £58,
Happiness Project



Ninety Percent

ninetypercent.com

For London-born luxury label Ninety Percent, the clue's in the name. They donate an impressive 90% of profits back into causes they believe in. Like, for example, BRAC, which empowers women living in poverty. Or Children's Hope, which educates children in the slums of Bangladesh; and War Child, which protects children affected by conflicts. 'We created a concept that is all about making maximum change with our profits,' explains co-founder Shafiq Hassan. 'Where our customers know they are a part of a revolution in the way businesses are run. Why not change and find our version of capitalism? We're trying something different.'

Cardigan, £250,
Ninety Percent

Skirt, £210,
Ninety Percent

Shine The Light On

shinethelighton.com

While Shine the Light On (STLO) founder Eli Brown was unpacking merchandise in a shop, a woman read his brand's story on a tag and started to cry. Her son had died by suicide weeks before. His name was Eli, too. Brown felt a connection – he'd struggled with drugs and alcohol after experiencing sexual abuse. He created STLO so that no one would have to go through a similar thing alone. His community now has help at their fingertips thanks to the brand's support of orgs such as Mindfulness Without Borders and the National Alliance On Mental Illness.

Hoodie, £60,
Shine the Light On

A few more of our faves giving back

Nobody's Child

The London label works with charities including TreeSisters. Its latest collab with Fearne Cotton's Happy Place launches in spring.

Dress, £55,
Nobody's Child

Estella Bartlett

Select necklaces give 100% of profits to the Young Women's Trust, which strives towards economic and career justice for young women.

Necklace, £22,
Estella Bartlett

Kate Spade

With a mission to help women and girls gain access to mental health resources, Kate Spade donates funds to groups including The Trevor Project.

Bag, £445,
Kate Spade

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY THE MAYFAIR GROUP; HAPPINESS PROJECT; NINETY PERCENT; SHINE THE LIGHT ON

Necklace, £39, Estella Bartlett

Earrings, £450, Monica Vinader

Necklace, £166.99, Crystal Haze at The Jewellery Showroom

Earring, £62, Pdpaola

Earrings, £58.99, Rani & Co

This crystal jewellery might just save your 2023

Good vibes kind of, sort of, guaranteed

WORDS: SOPHIE LEEN

1. Ring, Ginette NY 2. Earrings, Monica Vinader x Kate Young 3. Necklace, Mckenzie Liautaud 4. Bracelet, Jia Jia 5. Earrings, Octave Jewellery

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: MALLORY RICE; ANDREA ZENDEJAS. PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFFREY WESTBROOK. PROP STYLIST: GOZDE EKER

Ring, £149, Harris Reed x Missoma

Necklace, £49, TBalance

Pendant, £58.99, Crystal Haze at The Jewellery Showroom

Earrings, £192, Anita Berisha at The Jewellery Showroom

Ring, £95, Carrie Elizabeth

Ring, £89, Harris Reed x Missoma

Necklace, £34, Wanderlust Life

Earrings, £85, Spells Of Love

Earring, £314, Maria Black

Ring, £98, Lucy Williams x Missoma

Bracelet, £105, Stellar 79

Ring, £295, Rat Betty

RESET YOUR MOOD

Balancing the mind, body and spirit, **amethyst** is the symbol of peace and calming energy for our chaotic lives. *Inhales deeply*

Keep **rose quartz** close to your heart, as the crystal of unconditional love promotes lasting relationships and self-love.

Dreamy **moonstone** symbolises inner growth and strength. Linked to the moon (obvs), it guides you through times of big change.

Lapis lazuli inspires wisdom and clarity. It also acted as an ancient migraine remedy. Worth a shot, eh?

In search of support? **Onyx** is a gemstone of protection, relieving us of worries, fears and stressful tension.

Erm, **labradorite** has major BCE (big crystal energy). Reducing anxiety and promoting success, it inspires imagination and creativity.

Manifest your dreams with **topaz,** as it helps you break free of limitations, clarifies your thoughts and bolsters confidence.

Got a job interview coming up? The calming, soothing energy of **aquamarine** invites bravery and courage.

Miaou is having a serious moment

Lovers of a killer co-ord, here's the reason everyone wants to squeeze into a corset

WORDS: SASKIA QUIRKE

Corset
£200.38

Dress
£216.73

It's safe to stay Miaou has had a pretty stratospheric rise to fame. Bursting on to the scene in 2016, founder Alexia Elkaim created a fresh aesthetic that stood out from the crowd thanks to a combination of playful prints and sexy silhouettes. Fast-forward to September 2022 and the cult label celebrated its first catwalk show in Paris (Miaou is French for Meow, after all), cementing its spot as the brand we'd most like to nosedive into right now.

Its success has been sped along by a roll call of celebrity fans longer than the Met Gala's invite list – Billie Eilish, Kim Kardashian, Dua Lipa, Barbie Ferreira, Hailey Bieber and Kendall Jenner. Miaou even made the cut on *Euphoria,* with Maddy showcasing the Azul Ginger dress in season two.

Then came the collaboration with curve model and fashion goddess Paloma Elsesser in 2022. Seeing curvy bodies poured into these sensual designs sparked joy for women everywhere – even more exciting are plans to extend the size range.

After initially dabbling in denim, it was the curve-enhancing corsets that really put Miaou on the map. Is it too much of a stretch to say they're the reason ribbing is back in fashion on the catwalk (see page 106)? We might look to the big designers for inspo, but who are *they* looking at? If it's emerging brands that are making waves in the industry, Miaou just had a tsunami of a year.

Trousers
£208.50

PHOTOGRAPHY: ZORA SICHER; ANIS BELARBI; STEPHEN JAFFE. ALL COURTESY OF MIAOU

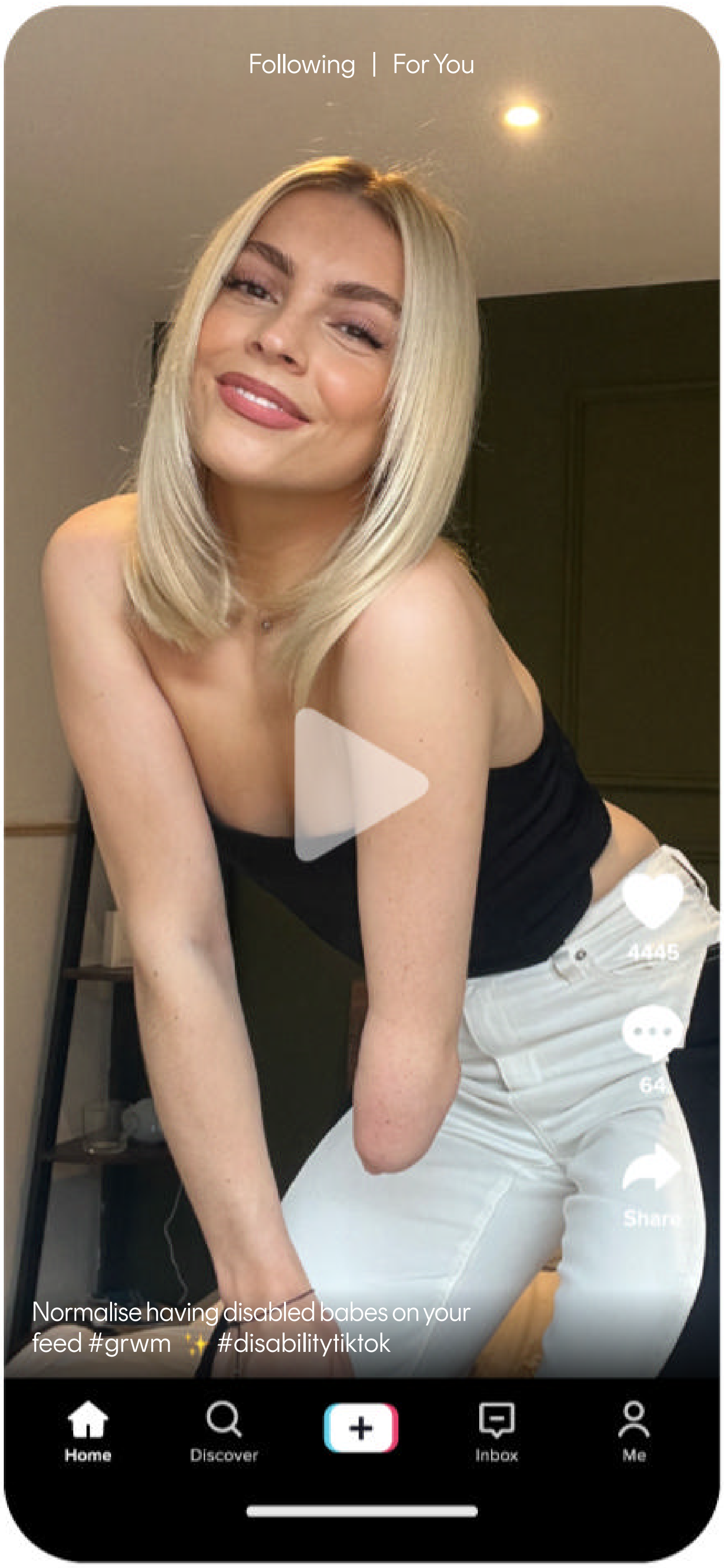
'It's time to normalise having disabled GRWMs in your feed'

Model Gemma Adby, 26, born with a left arm limb difference, thinks more of the millions of #GRWM ('Get Ready With Me') social posts should feature disabled people

I was born with a limb difference. I often describe myself as a one-armed girl in a two-armed world. Growing up, my generation didn't see disabled people in pop culture – even though 14.6 million people with disabilities currently live in the UK. I never saw any role models like me and I seemed 'different' to my peers. Without access to social media back then, I had no one like me to look up to. That made me feel like I wanted to hide my disability.

I love fashion, but for years my wardrobe was based around my arm. I hid under baggy clothes and my search history on every fashion site was 'long-sleeved'. Going shopping was bittersweet, I loved what was trending, but wouldn't buy things unless they covered my arm. It feels weird to think that now, but I couldn't leave the house without my arm covered back then. People would stare, and the insecurity and anxiety was too much.

I was nervous to start social media, because you're really putting yourself out there in a vulnerable way. I kept seeing 'Get Ready With Me' videos on my feed – where people film how they get dressed and ready for the day – but never any GRWMs by disabled babes. I wanted to change that. I cautiously posted my first video in summer 2022 and I couldn't believe how quickly it blew up – it got 700k views on TikTok. The response was amazing. Knowing that disabled people of all ages, especially women, could watch my videos and see someone like them was huge.



Normalise having disabled babes on your feed #grwm ✨ #disabilitytiktok

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF GEMMA ADBY

I went from never letting my arm show in public to letting hundreds of thousands of people see me online. Doing what I love and reaching so many others made my confidence grow. Now I've built this incredible community and connected with so many talented disabled creators.

At the start of the pandemic, I signed with an agency for disabled models. I felt so proud of myself after a shoot, because I was pushing myself way out of my comfort zone. I realised that this is what I love doing and now, alongside modelling and social media, I'm content director for Liberare, an adaptive intimates brand. My whole life is now fighting for representation in the fashion industry.

Brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Aerie and Liberare are leading the inclusion revolution. It goes beyond disabled models starring in campaigns, it's about functional products adapted for disabilities. There's a long way to go with the fashion industry, but it makes me happy to see brands becoming more accessible. And with creators like me helping to normalise seeing disabled babes on our feeds, it's a small step in the right direction.

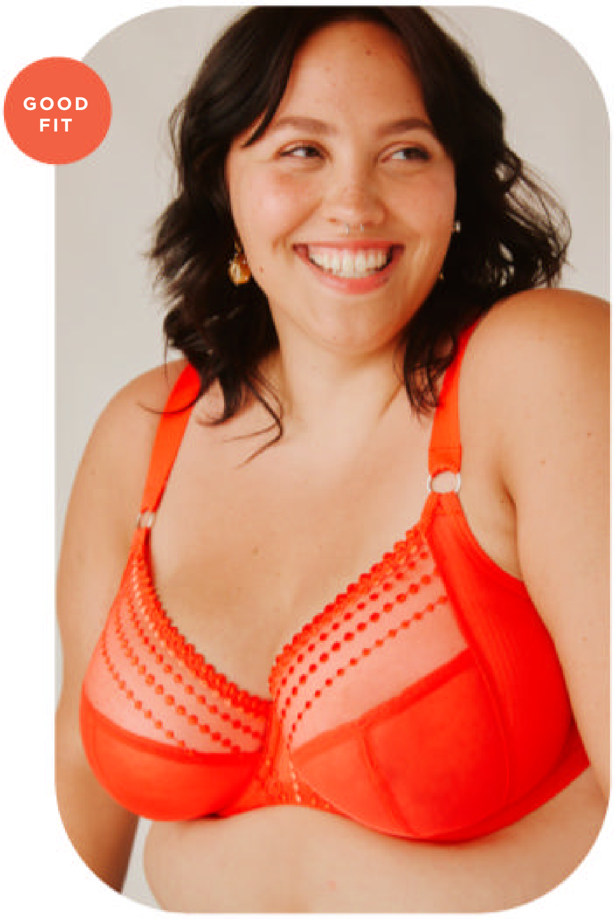
How your bra should actually fit, btw

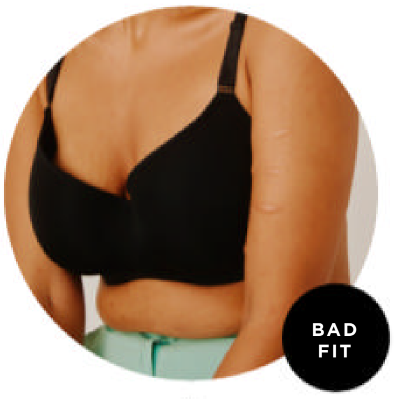
Because the world needs a refresher

WORDS: RACHEL TORGERSON

S**o, hi.** Many people already know the correct way to measure for a bra – some of us have even been measured 'professionally' at M&S in what can only be described as one of the most awk encounters of our teen years. Yet, somehow, pretty much none of us are wearing the right size. I believe the scientific term for this is… huh?

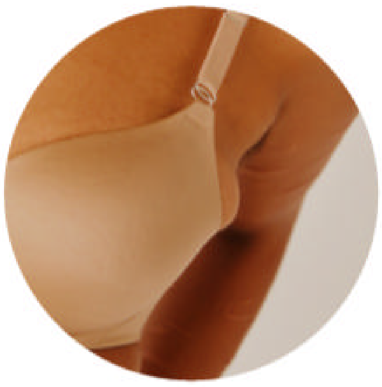
What it all boils down to is this: boobs change! You know, generally growing into an adult means that size fluctuations happen. And measuring is kinda hard! DW, though, we're here to walk you through it *and* double-check that you have the right size by problem-solving the most common fit issues. So get into your birthday suit and scooch your eyes to the right. Nothing awkward about it, promise.





The cups need to be totally full

As in, no gaps, like those in the pic above. Your boobs should fit nicely in the teardrop shapes. If you think you have the right size but still have gaps, try a different kind of bra. Balconettes and demi-cups are great for those who are fuller on the bottom of the breasts but not as much on the top.



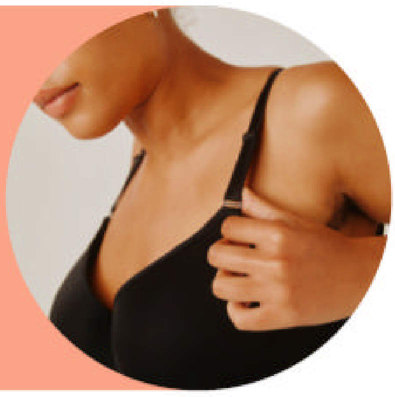
Spillage should not exist

Even if you're in search of a cleave-y look, you don't want to go for cups that are too small for you. That will just create lumps that'll show through even an opaque top, which is definitely not what you're after. What you're looking for is a super-smooth transition between your skin and the edges of your bra cups.

PHOTOGRAPHY: EMMA TRIM. FASHION STYLIST: ANDREA ZENDEJAS. PHOTO ASSISTANT: ASHLEY WILSON. HAIR: CLARA LEONARD AT THE WALL GROUP. MAKE-UP: JULIETTE PERREUX AT THE WALL GROUP. MANICURE: MAMIE ONISHI AT ATELIER MANAGEMENT. FROM LEFT: (1) ELOMI BRA (BARENECESSITIES.COM), MOUNSER EARRINGS.

DIY your size

Get thee a measuring tape and note the circumference of your chest (1) below your boobs and (2) right over your boobs (across the nipples). The first number is your band size (rounded up or down to the nearest whole even number). Now subtract that from your second measurement. A one-inch difference is an A cup, a two-inch diff is a B cup, a three-inch diff is a C cup, and so on.



Beware of hiking

When you look at your bra band from the side, it should be straight across your ribcage, not angling up in the back – that's a sign your band is too large. If that's you, consider going down a width (and up a cup size) for a better silhouette. Always hook your bra to its loosest fastening. The tighter options are for when a bra loses elasticity.

All straps must be snug

… but not too snug. If yours are doing the bulk of the work supporting you and digging into your shoulders, you may have the wrong band size. Yes, it's the band, not the straps, that should do the heavy lifting. Straps keep falling? You could have downward-sloping shoulders, which is totally normal. Try plunge-style bras that account for this.

Strapless bras should stay put

Having to oh-so-casually heave up your lingerie every hour is not ideal. If you have the right fit, this shouldn't be an issue (although the bigger bust struggle is real). Bonus points for brands that put a thin line of tacky silicone along their bra's inside to make sure no wardrobe malfunctions occur.

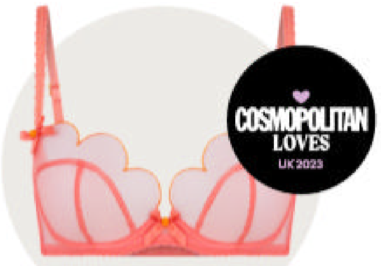
(2) KNIX BRA, ANNIE COSTELLO BROWN EARRINGS, ROSETTA GETTY SKIRT (THEOUTNET.COM). (3) CHANTELLE BRA, GANNI PANTS (NORDSTROM.COM), JENNIFER FISHER EARRINGS, NOTTE NECKLACE. (4) CUUP BRA, LOREN STEWART EARRINGS. (5) THIRDLOVE BRA, ROBERTO COIN NECKLACE, JENNIFER ZEUNER JEWELRY EARRINGS

Now we've found the perfect fit, is it time for a restock?

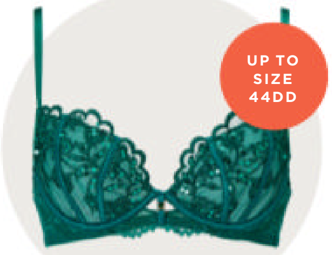
Any excuse to lust after beautiful lingerie, eh?

WORDS: SOPHIE LEEN

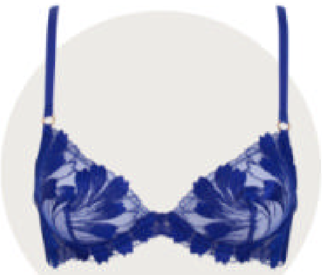
Full cup


COSMOPOLITAN
LOVES
UK 2023

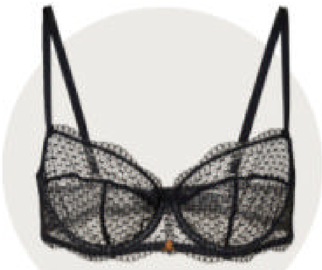
£85, Agent Provocateur


UP TO SIZE 44DD

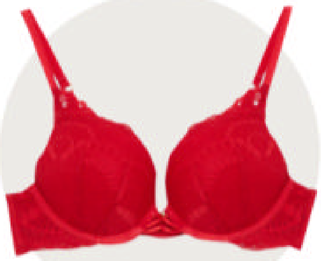
£36, Ann Summers



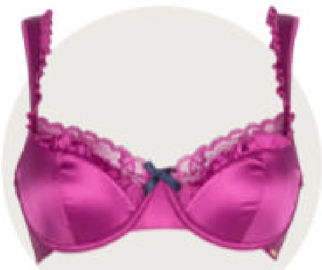
£36, Bluebella



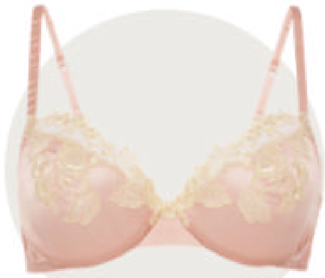
£60, Beija



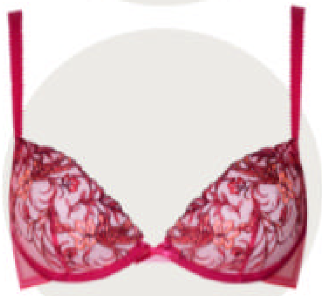
£14.99, New Look



£36, Boux Avenue

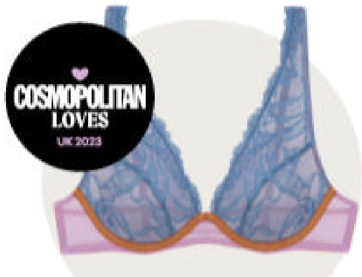


£360, La Perla

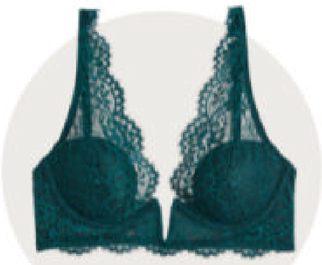


£97, Myla (part of a set)

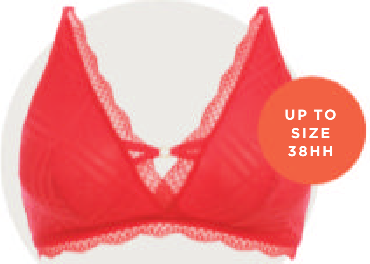
Triangle


COSMOPOLITAN
LOVES
UK 2023

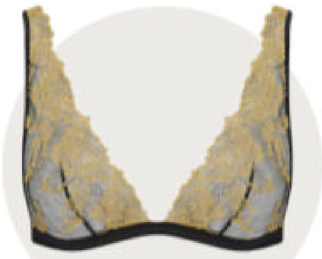
£60, Dora Larsen



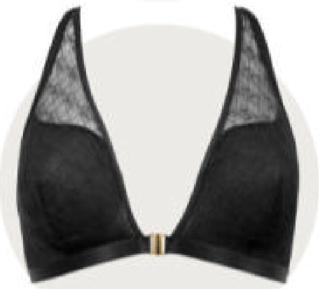
£18.99, H&M


UP TO SIZE 38HH

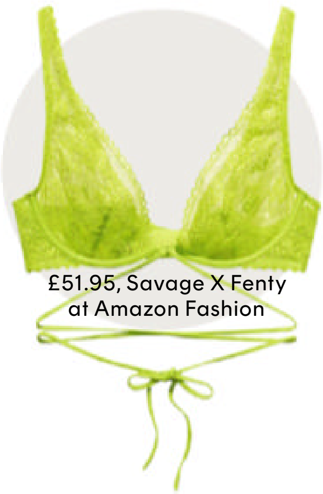
£29, Freya



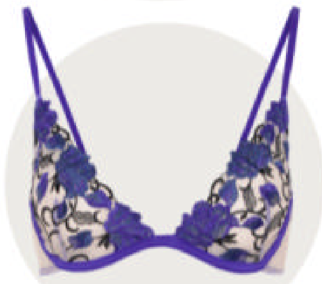
£125, Coco de Mer



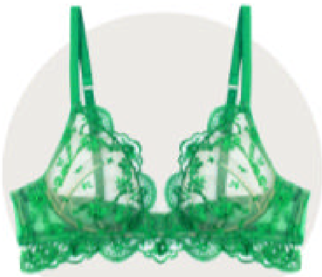
£22, Pour Moi



£51.95, Savage X Fenty at Amazon Fashion



£28, Wild Lovers London at wolfandbadger.com



£165.57, I.D Sarrieri

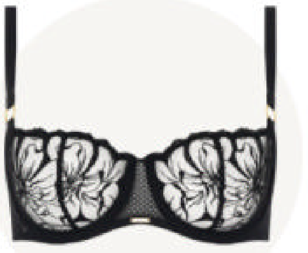
PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF DORA LARSEN

Balconette

£47, Intimissimi

COSMOPOLITAN LOVES UK 2023

£36, Bluebella


£74, Chantelle

£58, Fox Lingerie

£20, Monki

£98, The Underargument

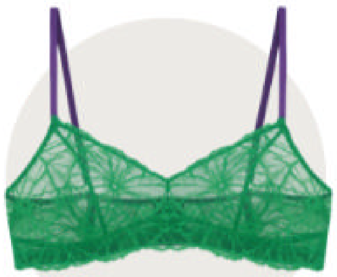
£75, Simone Pérèle

£135, Coco de Mer

Bralette

COSMOPOLITAN CONSCIOUS UK 2023

£42, Nudea


£58, Dora Larsen

£15, Monki

£32, Free People

£70, Simone Pérèle

Calvin Klein
£35, Calvin Klein

£34, SKIMS

£47, Baserange

Big bust

£40, Oti x Bravissimo

UP TO SIZE 42H

£102, Empreinte

£52, Wacoal

COSMOPOLITAN LOVES UK 2023

£48, Elomi

£99, Empreinte

UP TO SIZE 38G-40F

£85, Simone Pérèle

£39, Freya

£18.20, M&S

Jacket - by model's partner
Trousers - by model's partner
Make-up - by model's partner
Inadequacies - by model's partner
Desperation - by model's partner
Fear - by model's partner

Coercive control by your partner can take over your life.

From the colour of the lipstick you wear, to what you think, say and do, living with a controlling partner means that your decisions are not always your own. Coercive control is as serious as physical abuse, which is why it's now against the law. If your relationship doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

We are here. 10am-6pm
chat.womensaid.org.uk

women's aid
until women & children are safe

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How to build a budget **Page 56**
My mum is always agitating me **Page 58**
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Perfect your posture **Page 61**
Should I go sober? **Page 62**

thrive

Do you have rust-out?

Fed up? Feeling uninspired? Writing that resignation letter as we speak? This might be the career pep talk you need…

WORDS: HARRIET HALL

Every weekday morning at 8.30am on the dot, Maeve* sits at the small table in her living room, the oppressive quiet of the flat swelling as she opens up her laptop and waits for a task from her boss to hit her inbox. Once she has completed it – some take hours, others just 30 minutes – she waits again. Some days, another task never arrives, so she scrolls through LinkedIn, looking for suitable vacancies. Having once been a conscientious worker, Maeve has now, in her own words, 'given up'.

Earlier this year, the 28-year-old agency manager landed her dream job. For Maeve, the first couple of months were exciting and challenging. 'I was creating content, sending newsletters to more than 300,000 people, doing interviews and creating campaigns for some of the biggest brands – it was great,' she says. Then, a new staff member joined the company and took over most of Maeve's responsibilities, leaving her to pick up more basic tasks. Despite having over eight years of experience and working hard to climb the ladder, Maeve says she is now no more than a glorified assistant. 'I don't get any feedback; I'm not involved in any projects. It's almost like they've just decided not to bother with me. I dread starting work. It's soul-destroying,' she says. 'But I hate giving up – I want to be thriving, I know that I am capable of so much more than this.'

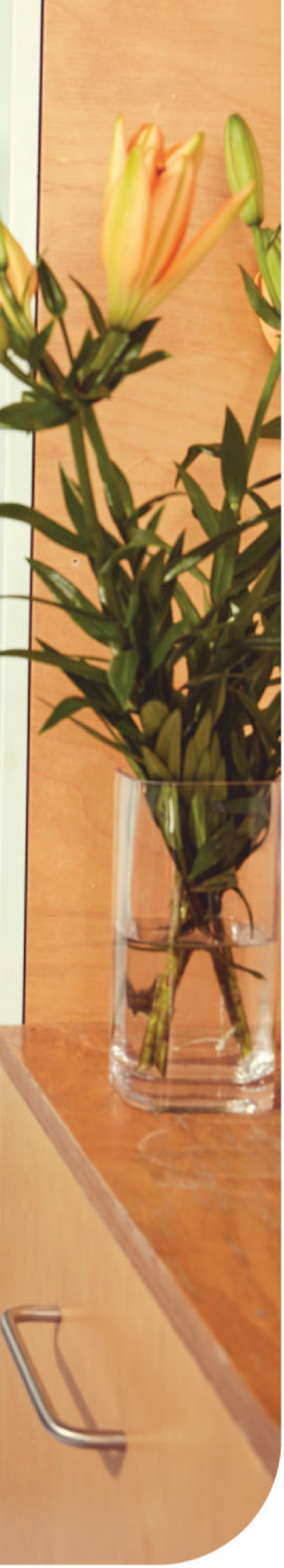
So why hasn't Maeve joined in with the Great Resignation and the record number of employees throwing in the towel over the past two years? 'I'm not in a position to quit. I have a mortgage to pay. I need a similar salary to be able to do that.' As the minutes, hours, days, weeks and months have yawned on, Maeve has started to lower her standards when it comes to the roles she applies for. She just has to get out.

The state of work

Maeve's apathy isn't rare. Gallup's global workplace report for 2022 found just 21% of people feel engaged (dropping to 14% in Europe – the region with the lowest percentage of engaged employees), with 60% feeling emotionally detached in their jobs and 19% miserable. Bleak.

Before the pandemic, these figures were more optimistic, with global engagement

Found yourself hitting a wall? Perhaps it's time for a change of direction



at work steadily increasing until 2019. But things have stagnated, with employees suffering burnout at record levels in 2021. Now, many of us are more reluctant to pour our entire selves into our jobs (sorry, boss!), resisting returning to the office full-time and pushing for improved working conditions. And on social media platforms, the term 'quiet quitting' has gone viral – the idea being that if you're unhappy at work, just put in the bare minimum of effort and take your pay cheque each month.

While setting boundaries is a healthy response to our always-on grind culture, for some, the mental impact of workplace unhappiness stretches beyond the confines of the nine to five. According to a recent *Cosmopolitan* survey, the vast majority of you – 91% – say that it's important for your work to give you a sense of purpose – and yet 52% of you don't feel motivated to succeed in your current role, with 65% of you reporting your job is having a negative impact on your mental health. And with most of us racking up 84,365 hours of work in our lifetimes (feel free, take a minute), job satisfaction is pretty essential.

Left out to rust

Despite so many of us feeling this sense of monotony and stagnation in our careers, you might not be familiar with the term that applies to this specific feeling of ennui. In contrast to burnout (characterised by exhaustion resulting from *overwork*), the *Groundhog Day* sensation born out of a *lack* of personally meaningful work, or mundane and monotonous activities (see: endless meetings that could have been emails), is known as rust-out.

When you're feeling disengaged by work, you have, in effect, been left out in the rain to rust like that bike you bought during the pandemic and have ridden approximately twice since. Teena Clouston, author of *Challenging Stress, Burnout And Rust-Out* and professor of occupational therapy at Cardiff University, says, 'Rust-out is a lot deeper and more profound than boredom. It's where people don't feel they're doing anything purposeful or being recognised. They often feel blocked – as if there's nowhere for them to progress to, and it can be a much harder issue to address than burnout.'

In a working culture where our worth has been so closely tied to our output and success for so long, is it any wonder that rust-out feels like a personal failure? 'The mental impact of rust-out can be quite dark. You can feel depressed – like you're stuck in the mud, unable to move,' Professor Clouston says, explaining that the knock-on effect is 'withdrawal and disinterest in our everyday lives outside of work'.

This is what has happened to 20-year-old manufacturing administrator Cassie*. Two years into her first job, she now feels as though she has lost all motivation. 'My job is so repetitive, to the point that I could tell you exactly what I'm doing at every minute of every day of my working week,' she says. This feeling of stagnation at work has also had an impact on her personal life. 'My mental health has taken a bad turn since starting my job. I feel like I'm at one of the lowest points in my life because of it. I feel so stressed and exhausted all the time. My family can see that in the way I crash out at home.'

Setting boundaries is a healthy response to our always-on grind culture

The practical bits

Burnout has become common enough that it's recognised and defined by the actual World Health Organization as an 'occupational phenomenon' – and more companies are coming up with strategies to prevent it from happening. But rust-out is far less known, or understood. And, although the idea of throwing in the towel might be appealing, it probably isn't an option for the majority of us – and certainly not in a cost of living crisis – making many feel at the mercy of their employer.

Rust-out doesn't have to sound the death knell for the job you're in, assures Professor Clouston, who explains there are routes that employees can take and things we can do to help regain control. 'First, it's about recognising that you're going through this. Then, if I was suffering with rust-out, I would ask my manager if I could carve out time for the bit of the job I really enjoyed – if not every day, then at least every week, to make sure that you're seeking out what is meaningful for you.' She advises asking for a progression plan and seeking out opportunities for training and mentorship. 'This can help you review what you want in the workplace and help you find that opportunity for change.' Finally, she says, it might be time to disinvest in some of the things you really dislike about your own

If monotonous work has got you feeling like a mug, speak up about it

role. 'People will often think it's selfish but it's more a case of redressing the work-life balance, ensuring that your wellbeing is as important as work.'

To do this, Professor Clouston advises reinjecting things you previously enjoyed back into your personal life. 'If you think, "Gosh, I love yoga or running, but I don't do it any more" – put it back in. Although work might be the causal factor in your low mood, it influences everything. It spreads into our lives, and we can help by creating positivity elsewhere.'

According to chartered psychologist Audrey Tang, a specialist in workplace wellbeing and author of *The Leader's Guide To Resilience*, rust-out is, at its core, an organisational issue. 'The reason for this is that with burnout, you're the one pushing yourself, even though your boss may be encouraging it; whereas the person rusting has been left by a careless manager.' Dr Tang says it is vital for companies to be more aware of rust-out and to counter it by providing work that is meaningful, so that they can make sure all of their employees are feeling recognised and equally valued.

Of course, not every workplace is going to be interested in employee development (boo) – as Cassie found out when she tried to approach her line manager with her concerns. 'My manager doesn't like conflict, so anything that's said to him will get disregarded. And the boss above him shuts down any conversation and finds a way to use anything you say against you, rather than helping you to develop.'

If you've tried all other avenues, it might be time to walk if your circumstances allow it, says Professor Clouston. 'The ability to recognise the things you can change and the things you can't is vital. As a general rule, once someone starts to rust out, the quality of work goes downhill, as the employee loses interest, finding the job unfulfilling. The person rusting also becomes cynical and difficult to deal with for the people around them. And if you can't break that cycle, that's where the disengagement grows and enthusiasm for work dissipates more and more.'

Keeping good employees happy involves more than just paying lip service with hollow wellbeing schemes, explains Dr Tang; it makes good business sense, too. 'If your workplace is simply using wellbeing as a checkbox, they'll lose the good people and be left with the dead weight,' she says. And it seems as though many employers just aren't listening. In PricewaterhouseCoopers' 2022 Workforce Hopes and Fears survey, which involved 52,195 workers across 44 countries, Gen Z and millennial workers were revealed as the age groups most likely to switch employers or leave the workforce over the next 12 months, with wanting a fulfilling job (68%) being a key reason. Our own survey also showed that 43% of you are considering quitting your current jobs.

'The changes we make in ourselves often set the conditions for us to thrive in the future'

However dismal your working situation might seem right now, remembering that there's no such thing as a wasted experience will go some way to help. 'Adversity can teach us a lot more than constant success ever could – and the changes we make in ourselves at the time often set the conditions for us to thrive in future,' says Dr Tang. Looking for a new role is also a great chance to avoid the same management errors you've fallen victim to in previous roles, as is remembering that the interview stage is as much about finding out what the organisation can offer you as it is about what you can offer them. 'I'd suggest people actually go to the place of work, ask for a tour and have the chance to speak to people informally about the workplace to see if it fits what it is you're looking for,' Dr Tang says.

While recent discussions around four-day working weeks are positive steps towards a world in which work isn't the only measure of life satisfaction, beyond the hours and the location of where we earn our living, how we're treated while doing it is of increasing importance. 'We've been almost brainwashed into thinking we have to give our all at work, but we must make sure that we're not giving so much that it's impacting other parts of our lives,' says Professor Clouston. 'We've got one life, for goodness sake – let's balance it.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: TRUNK ARCHIVE. *NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

Young Epilepsy

Life in my body...

with epilepsy

Olivia Salvati, a 25-year-old paralegal and law student from London, was diagnosed with epilepsy at the age of 11

AS TOLD TO JADE BIGGS

When I was 11 years old, I was trying on a new pair of shoes at the shopping centre with my mum. The next moment, we were outside the bookshop – I didn't know how we'd got there. It felt like time had somehow skipped forward, as if someone had accidentally sat on the remote control to my life.

This happened again. And again. Soon enough, I was at the doctor and my mum explained what had been going on and what my symptoms were, such as vacant stares, long pauses and memory loss. Before long, I was referred to a specialist, and tests confirmed there was seizure activity in my brain. What I'd been experiencing were absence seizures: brief but sudden lapses of consciousness. Everything happened pretty quickly after that. I had tests, and more tests and was told 'try this medication', or 'try that one'. I felt like a guinea pig.

At 14, I had my first tonic-clonic seizure – a fit involving stiffening and jerking of the body – this is what most people think of when I tell them I've got epilepsy. I was put on to a medication to manage them, but the side effects were severe and I was overcome with anger and anxiety.

Balancing seizures, puberty and the side effects of the medication was tough, so I was grateful when my medication was changed. Although, it took about six months until I felt like myself again.

Annoyingly, though, as soon as one area of my life evened out, something else fell apart. At 18, I headed off to university, full of excitement for the future. But I was forced to drop out as my seizures worsened. Believing that epilepsy had put an end to my dreams, I fell into a deep depression.

Through the help of therapy, however, I learned to accept that, although I can't change my condition, I can change my mindset towards it. Therapy – and the right medication – has also made my seizures more manageable, which I think shows how much your physical and mental health are connected.

Shortly after dropping out of uni, I found the strength to return and soon I'll be a human rights solicitor. Looking back, I see that, although epilepsy is a challenge, it hasn't stopped me from achieving my goals. I've arrived at every destination, just via a detour.

FOR MORE ON EPILEPSY AND TO ACCESS SUPPORT, VISIT EPILEPSY.ORG.UK OR YOUNGEPILEPSY.ORG.UK

What helps Olivia

SETTING BOUNDARIES

My lifestyle affects my epilepsy. If a friend asks to hang out on Saturday, but I had a busy Friday, I've learned to say no and respect what my body can handle. It's been a hard lesson – FOMO is real – but boundaries protect my health.

SELF-CARE AT WORK

It can be daunting to tell an employer about a health condition, but being honest with mine led us to create a care plan. Now my team is aware of how to help me if I have a seizure at work, and there's flexibility for me to take time off.

NO MORE COMPARISON

Social media has made us experts at comparing ourselves with others, so it can be tough seeing people my age achieving goals that I haven't. When I feel this way, I remind myself that I've been through a lot and I'll get there in my own time.

How to do money

Financial freakout

Help! How do I make a budget?

We all know culling your morning latte won't *actually* result in an overnight house deposit – but how do you get a grip on your finances, especially during these tricky times? We find out...

WORDS: JENNIFER SAVIN

MONTHLY

BREAK THINGS DOWN
'This is key to taking control of your money,' says Casey Goodwin, a financial planner and head of paraplanning at ethical finance firm Path Financial. 'Start with your total income (minus deductions for things like taxes), then list all the essentials you spend money on each month, such as rent, fuel, bills and food.' Free budget planner apps can help, too – MoneyHelper* has a credit card calculator to sort out your upcoming payments, while Emma combines all your accounts in one place. Heads up: some offer 'premium' features at an extra cost.

ALL IN ONE
Whether it's physical paperwork (think: bank statements, receipts and bills) or digital documents, file them all in one easily accessible place, Goodwin advises. Then, get your direct debit ducks in a row; it may take a few calls, but arranging your utilities and rent to be paid on the same day (ideally payday) makes it easier to manage a budget.

THE BIG SPLIT
Separate your salary into two bank accounts. 'One for bills, that you can't touch, and one for general spending,' Goodwin says. This will help you to track 'fun spends' vs 'fundamental spends'. Bonus tip: open your second account with a bank that gives out cash rewards for joining or switching to them – MoneySavingExpert lists some of the best offers available.

SAVE WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD
The current cost of living is high, and many of us simply can't put aside big savings each month, says Goodwin – but you can always start small. 'When you first start saving, it's not the amount that matters, but allowing the habit to form,' she stresses. 'Gradually, it will feel natural to increase your savings amount each time, adding up to a healthy pot and more confidence in money management.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY. *MONEYHELPER.ORG.UK/EN/EVERYDAY-MONEY/BUDGETING/BUDGET-PLANNER

WEEKLY

TAKE STOCK
At the end of each week, carve out some time to ask yourself, 'What could I have saved money on? What did I really *need*? What could I have gone without?' 'We all have busy lives, but your finances should be a priority,' says Goodwin. And your answers can form your goals for the next week or month, eg, 'I want to save £50' or 'I want to halve how much I spend on food'. Make sure your goals are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related).

NO-SPEND CHALLENGE
Ask a pal to join you in a 'no-spend' challenge for a week (or longer, if you're up for it). Having a buddy will encourage accountability (and maybe even healthy competition). When the urge to get a takeaway appears, you can both figure out a no-spend solution instead (eg, cook a meal together, or if you can't meet up, individually follow the same budget-friendly recipe and swap photos at the end). Transfer the money you've spared by not ordering pizza into a savings pot straight away to stay motivated.

WAIT IT OUT
Spotted something you *have* to own? Curb impulse purchases by giving yourself a waiting period. Two days, or even a week if you prefer, will allow you to consider whether you really need that new top/outfit for your cat. 'Shopping can be emotive; when we're feeling a little blue, we may spend to try and feel better,' says Goodwin. 'Set yourself a sensible 'single spend limit' – mine is £75 – and if a single item costs more than that, I'll wait at least a week before committing. If I'm still thinking about it, haven't considered an alternative or have enough savings available, I'll make the leap,' she says. Another hack? Set the item as your lock screen – if you're bored of looking at it before your waiting period ends, it's probably not worth the splurge.

DAILY

ROUND UP
If you're struggling to save, check if your bank offers a service that rounds up your transaction to the nearest pound, squirrelling away the difference automatically. 'This is a great option for generating small savings, particularly if you don't look at your bank account often,' Goodwin adds. Even if you only amass £20 a month for a little treat, it's something to build upon.

MENTAL WEALTH
A topic not often discussed is how financial worries can affect our mood, says Goodwin. 'Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, getting plenty of sleep and keeping active – if you can – will help. Try to have a daily routine, enjoy hobbies, connect with your friends and family – and importantly – be kind to yourself.'

BE HONEST
Not only with yourself, but about money in general when chatting to friends and family. That doesn't mean divulging everything if you feel uncomfortable sharing that information, but talking candidly with the right people can present important life lessons from those who have been there, done it and have wisdom to impart. 'Money is an emotive topic. If we're in financial distress, advice from our close circle can be invaluable, as is knowing we have a support network to help us through the bad times,' Goodwin says. 'It doesn't always need to be an extreme discussion. Asking a friend who they bank with, who they save with or if they pay into a pension can get an enlightening conversation going.'

FINE-TUNE YOUR SOCIALS
Following money-management experts, such as @MartinLewisMSE and @MyFrugalYear, who share their own tried-and-tested tips, can help top up your motivation levels (and provide relief from any 'buy me!' temptation posts that creep into your feed).

> **'When you first start saving, it's not the amount that matters, but allowing the habit to form and add up to a healthy pot'**

A little something extra...

YOUR JUNO
Think Duolingo, but for cash. This handy female-founded app offers daily bite-size lessons about money – it's billed as 'the best app for your financial glow up' for a reason. *Free to download; premium access (to all features) is billed at £6.99 per month. A 14-day free trial is available.*

HSBC
The bank runs free daily webinars on everything from first-time buying to navigating the cost of living crisis for customers, and it offers one-to-one 'financial health checks' for *everyone* – no matter who they bank with. See financialfitness.hsbc.co.uk for more details.

ENTITLED TO
You don't have to be unemployed in order to receive extra support from the government; those in full- and part-time work may qualify, too. Check out the benefits calculator on entitledto.co.uk to see if you're eligible.

My mum is always agitating me, but am I the problem?

Solutions to, erm, universal problems, from therapist Minaa B

Dear Minaa,

I'm wondering if I could be any better at dealing with my mum's increased need to communicate with me since my recent pregnancy.

We have lived on opposite sides of the country ever since I went to university, and I like it that way. It's not like my mum and I have a bad relationship – I just don't feel the need to be physically or geographically near her all the time.

For the most part, we've communicated in a normal, healthy way. But when my dad died several years ago, things changed. My parents were divorced and had been since I was a little kid. But my mum kept pressing me for more information on how I was feeling and what I was going through at the time. It felt really invasive, like she wanted to be a part of my grief even though I didn't want to talk about it with her. I could tell that she wanted that experience to be a shared one, but it wasn't.

I've tried to put up more boundaries since then, but it seems like it's only made her want to reach out more. She'll call me on a Tuesday afternoon and start asking deep questions that I simply don't have the time or emotional bandwidth to get into with her. Other times, she'll comment on one of my Instagrams from, like, seven years ago and then text me to see if I saw it. It feels like the more I try to explain to her the best way to communicate with me, the more frustrated and confused she gets. I thought that expecting my own child would give me an empathy boost, but, to be honest, it's done the opposite.

I know she's coming from a good place, but I have less and less patience. Am I in the wrong? Or just the worst daughter in the world?

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

Dear Writer,
First, you are not the worst daughter in the world, and no one is in the right or wrong here. The overall issue is a mismatch in communication, and the way you two interacted after your father passed is actually a really good example of that.

When you say that your mum wanted to be a part of your grief, that could be true. She might have also been dealing with her own sense of loss and wanted someone to help her navigate it. I want to be clear: it's okay that you weren't willing to go there. Sometimes a parent thinks their child can give them all the nurture and care they're looking for, but you can't be everything to everyone.

Fast-forward to now and despite setting limits, those disconnected vibes continue. I'm not sure what type of boundaries you established, but try to remember that their purpose isn't to put up walls. They help preserve a relationship by communicating your needs to the other person, and how you expect them to behave in return.

For you, that might look like ignoring her call when you don't feel like talking and following up with a text to let her know you're busy and that you want to make sure everything is okay. When you do pick up the phone and she takes the convo to a place you're not comfortable with, let her know you don't want to talk about that and change the subject. When you see those Instagram comments, put the phone down, take a deep breath and don't respond to them.

What people do isn't in our control, but our reaction to them is. So when someone's behaviour makes us feel disregulated (agitated, annoyed, anxious or just uncomfortable), it's up to us to stabilise our emotions in that moment by asserting our limits.

The most important part of setting boundaries is upholding them

The most important part of setting boundaries is upholding them – and it seems like that may be tough for you. But don't judge yourself for being straightforward with your mum. This isn't 'bad daughter' behaviour; you're being true to your feelings. You might get pushback – she might ask why you don't want to talk or engage with her comments. You don't owe her an explanation unless you want to give one. You can just say, 'I don't feel comfortable addressing this right now.' You might have to repeat yourself or your boundary, and you should if she isn't getting it. She has to make room for your needs.

That said, I think there's hope for you two to figure out how your communication got off-track. When you feel like you can approach her from a patient, calm place, you could say, 'It seems like we used to connect in a normal and healthy way, but I feel like there's been a disruption and that's why my boundaries increased.' Then you can discuss how her behaviour after your dad's death might have set this off. She might be totally unaware that you felt she was intrusive.

It sounds like you still want to be connected to your mum, and having this conversation can repair the disconnect.

Until then, make sure you stand firm in your boundaries. You're doing the right thing.

MINAA B is a therapist, writer, speaker and the founder of Minaa B Consulting, where she works with busy professionals on enhancing their wellbeing and developing workplace boundaries to improve their mental health. She is a co-host on Sydel Curry-Lee's *Because Life* podcast and sits on the mental health advisory committee for Wondermind, a mental-fitness company co-founded by Selena Gomez.

Try before you train

Health and fitness apps

Simply downloading an app on your phone can open up a world of easy, accessible self-care. We share our favourite health and fitness apps we can't live without

IF YOU WANT TO GET INTO YOGA

Asana Rebel, £8.99 per month, £28.99 year subscription
As someone with a short attention span, I'm never motivated to follow an hour-long fitness video at home. However, this app felt realistic for anyone with a busy lifestyle or beginning their yoga journey. The videos are quick and packed, lasting between five and 30 minutes.
Chloe, features intern

IF YOU WANT TO TRACK YOUR CYCLE

Flo, £5.99 per month, £29.49 year subscription
Having used the free version of Flo, I was unsure how much benefit there'd be to the premium version. But, after leaning into the new features, I'd recommend it to anyone wanting to feel more clued up about their cycle. My favourite feature is the diary function, which offers in-depth insights on irregular cycles.
Natasha, fashion editor

IF YOU WANT TO DECREASE STRESS

Glo, £19.39 per month, £197.91 year subscription*
For me, balancing my five life pillars is overwhelming, but using Glo, I feel more in control and on top of self-care. The app feels like a safe haven for all the essential activities needed to create and commit to a personal wellness practice. There are over 5,000 classes and programmes in yoga, Pilates, meditation and fitness.
Jaime, digital design editor

IF YOU WANT A FITNESS COMMUNITY VIBE

Body by Ciara, £17.99 per month, £179.99 year subscription
I've been a fan since the pandemic when it was a private Instagram account. Now an app, the energy and family vibe remains. A live workout schedule is led by boss Ciara and her trainer squad, with fun interactive chat. The online library is constantly refreshed with sessions from HIIT to yoga.
Anna, acting digital editor

IF YOU WANT TO MEDITATE ON THE GO

Superhuman, £25.99 per month, £159.99 year subscription
When I'm feeling worried, I crave verbal encouragement. I get plenty from my loved ones, but this meditation app is the perfect supplement. The audio clips are an uplifting mix: part intention-setting, part affirmation. I can't sit still for silent traditional meditation, so this app suits me.
Maddy, shopping editor

IF YOU WANT TO BUILD UP YOUR CARDIO

Couch to 5k, free
Before I started using the app, I hadn't run long distance (yes, 5k is long distance to me) since cross-country at school. Even if you're a total beginner, this programme builds gradually with running stints interspersed with walking. I was surprised at how quickly these sessions built up my fitness levels, and when it stepped up into straight runs, I was ready.
Saskia, fashion director

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF ASANA REBEL. *PRICES CONVERTED FROM $24 PER MONTH AND $245 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION

Hi, hello. Is my posture f*cked?

...or can
I fix it?
Help!

WORDS: JADE BIGGS

If you regularly find yourself sitting at your desk like a shrimp (you know: shoulders hunched over, spine with more twists and curves than fusilli pasta), then you've probably wondered what that's doing to your posture – and, more importantly, how you can fix it. Instead of rushing straight to Dr Google to get all the 'answers', heed the advice of physiotherapist Lyndsay Hirst.

What causes bad posture?

A lack of movement is often the cause of posture issues. 'A lot of us lead sedentary lifestyles; sitting at a computer all day, then spending the evening in front of the TV,' says Hirst. 'This creates a tendency to flex the spine without much movement, which can weaken the back's chain of muscles and start to cause pain. It can also create a stooping of the spine or rounding of the shoulders.'

Can you fix bad posture?

Yes you can – but the solution isn't to sit bolt upright at all times. That's because, 'if we continue to stay in a flexed position, we weaken the back muscles, increase the pressure on our intervertebral discs and leave ourselves open to a whole host of pain problems', Hirst explains.

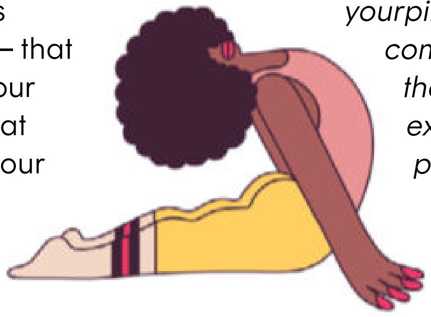
Erm, so how do you improve your posture?

First, don't splash out on gimmicks that promise to fix everything overnight. 'Our bodies are designed to move, we need to keep our muscles strong – wearing braces often inhibits the muscles from working correctly, which can cause longer term problems.'

Instead of whacking on a back brace and hoping for the best, Hirst advises to add as much movement into your day as possible. 'Take regular breaks to move around [and] switch between a standing desk and a seat to create varied movement,' she says, adding that small changes such as walking around the office regularly and taking the stairs rather than the lift can become healthy habits.

And on the topic of posture at the office (or your WFH set-up), make sure that your equipment is aligned just right – that means keeping your computer screen at eye level so that your head doesn't tilt, and placing your keyboard and mouse in line with your elbows. 'You could try placing a rolled-up towel in the small of your back [to reduce the curve of your spine when sitting],' adds Hirst. 'This will allow the rest of the spine to extend, too.'

Hirst also recommends practising Pilates or yoga. 'One of my favourites is the cobra stretch,' she says. 'Lie on your tummy with your hands either side of your head. Keep your legs and pelvis on the floor as you push your head and chest away from the ground. This is a lovely spinal extension stretch that will counteract the flexed posture you might be in all day.'



Lyndsay Hirst, founder of yourpilatesphysio.com, has more than 20 years of experience as a physiotherapist

ILLUSTRATIONS: FABIO BUONOCORE AT SYNERGY ART

START

Do you do Dry January, or have you ever done a sober month?

Yes.

No, but I've thought about it?

Cool! How'd it go?

It was a breeze.

I struggled.

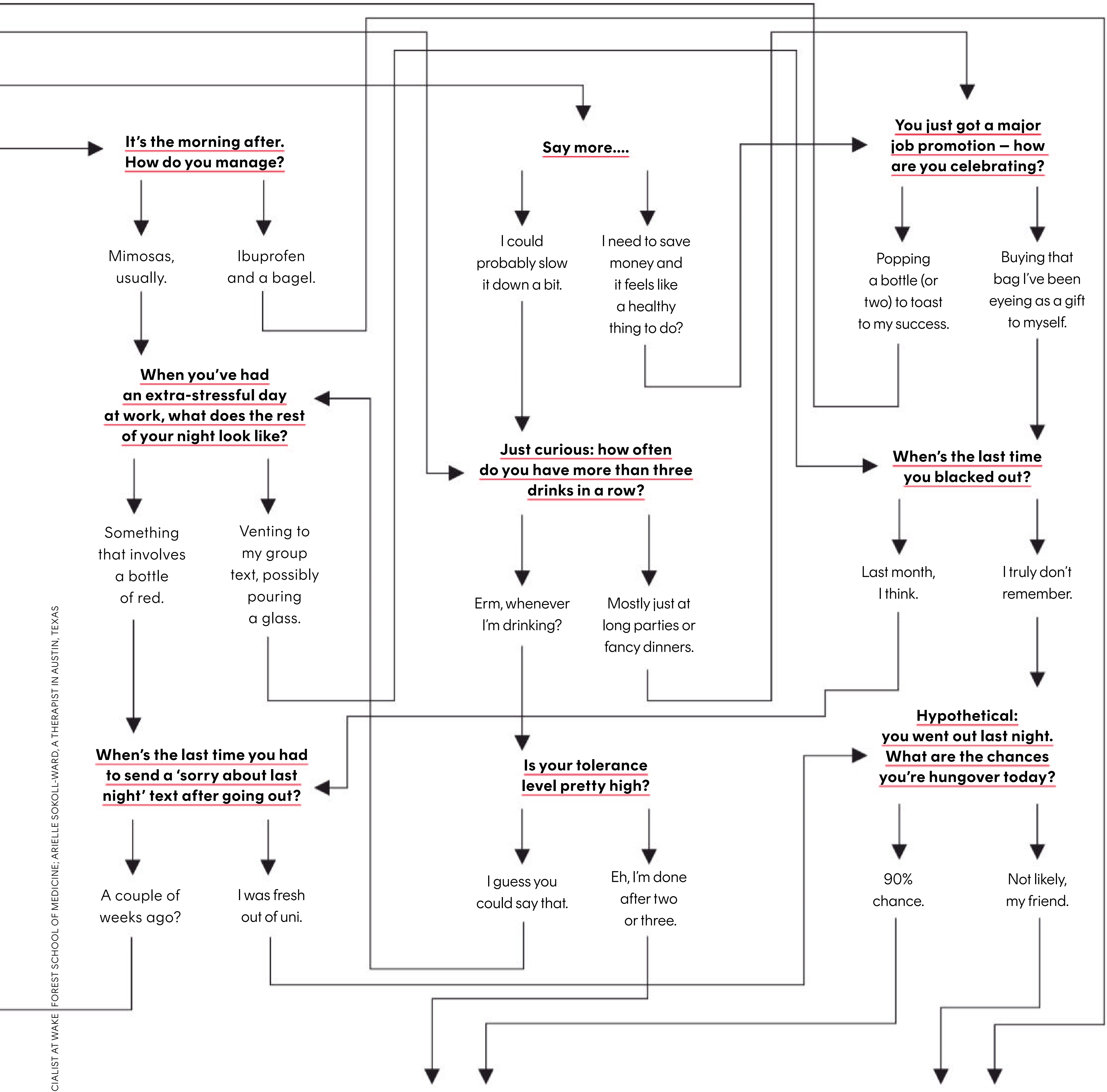
Should I try being sober for a while?

Been there, asked that. But now it's time to actually get some answers

WORDS: HANNAH SMOTHERS

Yeah, it's probably a good idea

A thing we should discuss: giving up le liquor this very second and for the foreseeable future is actually not a great way to deal if you're a little to a lot concerned about your drinking habits – and it sounds like you are? Instead, take a deep breath and enlist a GP or therapist to help you sample the...



It's the morning after. How do you manage?

Mimosas, usually.

Ibuprofen and a bagel.

When you've had an extra-stressful day at work, what does the rest of your night look like?

Something that involves a bottle of red.

Venting to my group text, possibly pouring a glass.

When's the last time you had to send a 'sorry about last night' text after going out?

A couple of weeks ago?

I was fresh out of uni.

Say more....

I could probably slow it down a bit.

I need to save money and it feels like a healthy thing to do?

Just curious: how often do you have more than three drinks in a row?

Erm, whenever I'm drinking?

Mostly just at long parties or fancy dinners.

Is your tolerance level pretty high?

I guess you could say that.

Eh, I'm done after two or three.

You just got a major job promotion – how are you celebrating?

Popping a bottle (or two) to toast to my success.

Buying that bag I've been eyeing as a gift to myself.

When's the last time you blacked out?

Last month, I think.

I truly don't remember.

Hypothetical: you went out last night. What are the chances you're hungover today?

90% chance.

Not likely, my friend.

...sober life in a safe, doable way. They'll also help you understand why cab sauv calls to you on a rough day... or a great one. Until that appointment, check out Drinkaware's website, where you can find information, strategies and tools to change your relationship with alcohol and reduce your drinking.

It can't hurt!

If you wound up here, you're likely somewhere in the grey zone between totally healthy drinking habits and a potential alcohol use disorder. But listen, if hangxiety consistently haunts you or your big Tuesday nights out are getting in the way of your Wednesday mornings at work, you might be interested in the sober curious movement, which involves setting some DIY scaled-back drinking rules (like, say, no weekday booze or last call at 9pm or a strict no-shots policy) and assessing how you feel when you drink versus when you don't (that's mindful drinking!). From there, do whatever makes you feel best. That's it!

You're likely just fine as is

Seems like you're the most casual of drinkers who sticks to the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of no more than 14 units per week – the equivalent of six pints of beer or six medium glasses of wine for both men and women. If you want to drink even less, mocktail your face off. But if not, you're doing great.

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance abuse or addiction, please contact Drinkaware on 0300 123 1110 or visit drinkaware.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY. LAURA VEACH, AN ADDICTION MEDICINE SPECIALIST AT WAKE FOREST SCHOOL OF MEDICINE; ARIELLE SOKOLL-WARD, A THERAPIST IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

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lighten up

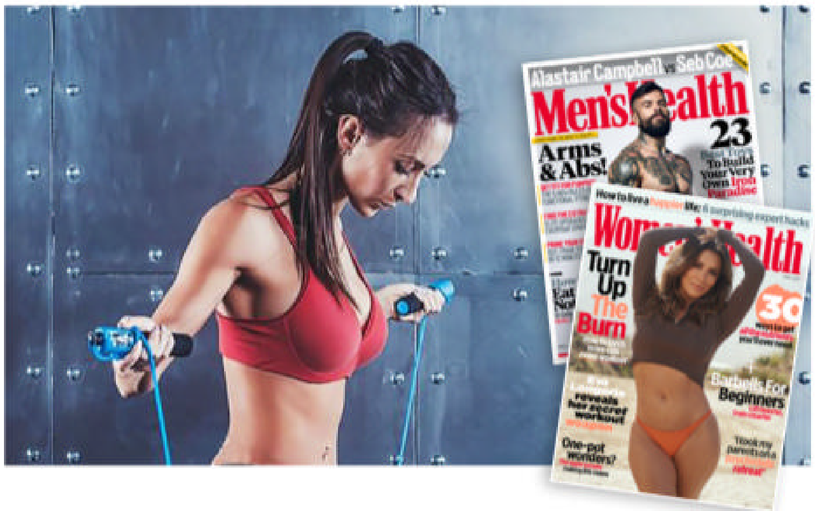
FOR THE HOME LOVER

Home is where the heart is, and nothing beats sitting down with a cuppa and taking some time away from your screen with our inspiring home and lifestyle ideas.

ELLE
ZOË KRAVITZ
BAZAAR
BEAUTY EDIT
Venus & Serena

FOR THE TREND-SETTER

Perfect for those who like to keep up to date with our style guides and fashion, plus our limited-edition beauty boxes.


Men's Health
Arms & Abs!
Women's Health
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Workout ideas from top PTs, plus delicious meals and nutrition tips in our magazines and special editions offer the perfect motivation for those looking to achieve their health and fitness goals.

RUNNER'S WORLD
REACH YOUR PEAK!
COUNTRY LIVING
Summer Sunshine

FOR THE OUTDOORSY TYPE

We have a brilliant selection of magazines for nature lovers, whether they're gardening fanatics or enjoy going for a run, from beginner to professional and everything in between.

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A genius way to use those sample paint pots
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What happened when you tried to organise
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relax

Bucket list wellness retreats you will thank yourself for

Whether you're staying local or going further afield, these locations promise all the rest and relaxation your mind deserves

WORDS: KRISTY ALPERT AND EMILY GULLA

1

2

IF YOU'RE INTO NATURE, GO TO...

Lake Austin Spa Resort, Austin, Texas, USA

Some of the offerings here (see: blue chi, sculling, bokken-do, floating meditation) sound a bit... unfamiliar. But picnic, paddle and prosecco? That we get. And also love. As for the rest, on-site life coaches, mind-body experts, massage therapists, energy workers, nutritionists and personal trainers can explain (and customise) everything just for you.

El Silencio Lodge, Bajos del Toro, Costa Rica

No synthesised spa environments here. Just a Costa Rican cloud forest with real waterfalls, chirping birds and the scent of rain. You can take your spa treatments in your private villa, but you'll need to head to the forest bathing deck for yoga, meditations and sound healing classes.

Armathwaite Hall, Lake District, UK

Located at Bassenthwaite Lake in Cumbria, Armathwaite Hall offers all the usual spa treatments, plus some more unique wellness retreat packages. Think: forest bathing, animal therapy and a trip to the Lake District Wildlife Park (there are alpacas), all designed to foster a deeper connection with nature.

IF YOUR IDEA OF WELLNESS MEANS EATING WELL, GO TO...

The Pig Hotels, locations across the south, UK

Described as 'restaurants with rooms', The Pig Hotels are really all about the food. What isn't grown on-site is sourced from the local area – so good for your stomach *and* the planet. The eight Pigs are found across Hampshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Kent and West Sussex, ideal for a coastal or country escape.

Willows Lodge, Woodinville, Washington, USA

Staying in Woodinville wine country comes with plenty of perks – waking up to chicory beignets covered in huckleberry frosting and taking solitary walks in nature after a memorable meal at the Barking Frog restaurant. Bonus: many of the overnight packages for these cabin-inspired rooms include wine, food and spa time.

Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa, Ojo Caliente, New Mexico, USA

Those blistered shishito peppers you'll be ordering after soaking in the soothing thermal waters at this desert resort? Grown 1,000 feet away. In fact, nearly everything here is sourced locally, including the herbs in the hydrotherapy hot-towel wraps used during spa treatments such as the Satva Botanicals Massage.

3

1. Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa
2. A cabin at The Pig, New Forest, Hampshire
3. Water activities at Lake Austin Spa Resort

IF YOU'RE JUST NOT INTO YOGA, GO TO...

Spa Eastman Health & Wellness Resort, Eastman, Quebec, Canada

All-inclusive at this Canadian resort means rooms, meals and as many different daily activities as you could ever want, all set on 323 acres of Quebecian countryside. The 'At your wits end' package even includes power-nap sessions in the NeuroSpa pod. The truly brave go for the Disconnect Option and turn in their electronic devices at check-in.

The Kentucky Castle, Versailles, Kentucky, USA

Only in Versailles can you fall asleep in a private tower suite after a day of reiki sessions, equine mindfulness experiences and massages – all of which take place at a legit castle. Prepare to live like royalty.

Retreat East, Suffolk, UK

Relaxation is calling. Choose from a selection of barns, farmhouses and hotel rooms to sleep in, then book one (or more!) of the many spa treatments offered at the Wellness Centre – from Lava Shell massages to a delicious list of facials. Alternatively, schedule a single spa day if you'd rather keep things short and sweet.

6

4

5

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEWART COHEN; JAKE EASTHAM; LEE ALLISON

IF YOU WANT TO SWITCH OFF, GO TO...

Laluna, Grenada, the Caribbean

Mornings here consist of sipping freshly squeezed juices and doing yoga on the beach before diving into the pool. Unless, that is, you're more into Balinese massages, healing sessions or hanging by the sea (honestly, who could blame you?). Either way, end your day with a full moon meditation practice for all the zen vibes.

Carillon Miami Wellness Resort, Miami Beach, Florida, USA

Prepare to return home with a different kind of post-holiday glow. Carillon's board-certified physicians and skilled practitioners will tailor your experience to your specific wellness goals – physical, mental, spiritual – with absolutely radiant results every time.

Unplugged Cabins, locations 1-2 hours from London or Manchester, UK

Unplugged offers the ultimate adventure: a full-blown digital detox. There are 11 cabins located close to London, plus one in Cheshire and and two more northern-based sites coming soon. The idea is simple: lock your phone away in the box provided, then spend three days enjoying your countryside surroundings and the simple pleasures of cabin life. Okay, we can't guarantee sunshine, but being offline will mean spending way more time in the great outdoors.

4. Relaxation at Carillon Miami Wellness Resort
5. The beautiful grounds of Kentucky Castle
6. Switch off at Koya, Unplugged cabin in Essex

Your coffee station deserves a makeover

A case for accessorising your caffeine habit

Be gone, pricey mochas and 'meh' oat milk lattes. Create barista-worthy brews with our coffee station must-haves, ideal for satisfying your aesthetic needs, your coffee craving and your budget

Coffee maker, £26.99, TK Maxx

Storage jar, £18, Sass & Belle

Earthenware milk jug, £22, iamfy.co

Compostable coffee pods, £9.95 for 30, Grind

Venice espresso maker, £23, Trouva

Glass spoons, £46 for a pair, Hay at Amara

Ceramic tea set, £39.50, Oliver Bonas

Jar with lid, £11, Sass & Belle

Mug, £13, Sass & Belle

Cafetière, £14.99, TK Maxx

WORDS: HANNAH CHUBB; LAYNIE ROUCH. ADDITIONAL REPORTING: DUSTY BAXTER-WRIGHT. PHOTOGRAPHY: CODY GUILFOYLE. PROP STYLING: GÖZDE EKER

Can you believe this thing is vegan?

And that it's breakfast? Introducing the brainchild of Hannah Sunderani, author of *The Two Spoons Cookbook*, which is packed with plant-based recipes that prove good-for-you food can actually taste good. Veganuary = sorted

WORDS: HANNAH CHUBB
PHOTOGRAPHY: ADAM FRIEDLANDER

Chocolate coffee shake

MAKES 1

250ml unsweetened oat milk
20g gluten-free rolled oats
1 large frozen banana, chopped
1 medjool date, pitted
1 shot espresso
2 tbsp almond butter
2 tbsp cocoa powder
½ tsp cinnamon
3-5 ice cubes
Vegan whipped cream
Vegan chocolate sauce

1. In a blender, combine the oat milk, oats, frozen banana, date, espresso, almond butter, cocoa powder, cinnamon, 3 ice cubes and a pinch of sea salt. Blend until smooth.

2. If you prefer your shake a little colder and thicker (and no one would blame you), add the remaining ice cubes and blend again.

3. Pour this perfection into a large glass. Top with whipped cream and drizzle on some chocolate sauce if desired (which, duh).

ADAPTED FROM *THE TWO SPOONS COOKBOOK* BY HANNAH SUNDERANI. © 2022 HANNAH SUNDERANI. PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN, AN IMPRINT OF PENGUIN CANADA, A DIVISION OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE CANADA LIMITED. REPRODUCED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH THE PUBLISHER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PROP STYLIST: GÖZDE EKER. FOOD STYLIST: MAGGIE RUGGIERO

Why aren't you using up your paint sample pots?

Time to upgrade your gallery wall

WORDS: DUSTY BAXTER-WRIGHT

If your cupboard under the sink is stuffed full of half-used miniature tins of paint (in a variety of random colours), we have the perfect way to use 'em up. Grab any old frames and photo mounts (or scout some out in a charity shop) and give them an Instagram-worthy upgrade in three easy steps.

STEP 1

Dismantle your frame and mount. Give the wood a light scrub with some sandpaper.

↓

STEP 2

Shake your tester pot of paint before removing the lid and liberally paint your frame and/or mount. It might take a few coats.

↓

STEP 3

Wait for the paint to dry and reassemble, breathing a new lease of life into your favourite artwork and photographs.

Shake it, shake it (just keep a lid on it)

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; STOCKSY

Just a list of things that happened when you tried to become someone who organises

You had such good intentions

WORDS: SARAH WELDON

1. A label-maker died doing what it loved: creating a convoluted system to classify your undies.

2. 'Kitchen space' was your main Rightmove search term. How else do you display 35 jars of coffee, porridge and pasta?

3. You spent hours trying to decide if the jumper that reads 'Amy's Bat Mitzvah '08' still brings you joy. (Sorry, Amy.)

4. Sudden night terrors struck, which involved Marie Kondo screaming 'Does it bring joy?' as stuff from your junk drawer slowly buries you alive.

5. A concerned bank employee called about a suspicious Ikea purchase for £291. You explained, 'Small boxes that fit into medium boxes that all go into XL boxes are expensive.'

6. Food shopping just became extra awful after you arranged your fridge by category. Cream cheese: a dip or a spread?

7. Your phone now hosts 1,004 photos of your clothes in rainbow order. Deep in your heart, you knew this arrangement would only last three to four business days (and yes, you were correct).

PHOTOGRAPHY: GIUSEPPE PALMISANO (COLLECTION OF FRANCESCO RELLINI)

Raye is making moves

She's written for Beyoncé, had multiple Top 10 singles and was signed to one of the world's biggest record labels. But for seven long years, she wasn't allowed to release an album. Why? This is Raye's story...

WORDS: SHANNON MAHANTY ______ PHOTOGRAPHY: EM COLE ______ FASHION: MADDY ALFORD AND SASKIA QUIRKE

OPENING SPREAD: Top, Mugler at Mytheresa; pants, Priscavera; earrings, Ateliersó
OPPOSITE PAGE: (from top) Corset and leggings, Marine Serre; earrings, By Alona; (below) hat, Emma Brewin; earrings, same as before

When Raye was seven, she met a homeless man on her local high street. 'Why doesn't he have anywhere to go?' she asked her dad, after they'd given him some spare change. 'It isn't fair.' Young enough to experience strong emotions without repressing them, and old enough to understand injustice, her reaction was a strong one. That day turned out to be pivotal. In the hours that followed, her dad was unable to placate her. Instead, Raye – whose real name is Rachel Keen – went home and wrote her very first song, which she titled *Change Your World*. 'I was so upset!' she explains, although a soft smile spreads across her face when she remembers herself as a wide-eyed seven-year-old. 'I just had to write about it.'

After that first experiment in songwriting, Raye vowed to become a musician and has never looked back. Growing up in Croydon, the prestigious Brit school (attended by Amy Winehouse and Adele) was local to her, and she landed a place when she was 14. Two years later, she decided to leave, mainly because she'd already started getting offers from major labels. Her path seemed set, and she would soon go on to become one of the most successful songwriters of her generation, amassing eight top 20 singles, and millions of monthly listeners on Spotify. Raye has written for a handful of globally recognised artists, too – John Legend, Charli XCX, Hailee Steinfeld, Madison Beer – the list goes on. And, in 2019, she wrote a track for Beyoncé's *Lion King* album: more on that to come.

Now, in a north London studio 18 years after it all began, Raye is feeling good. On set, the musician is a lot of fun. She is warm and loud and effusive. She addresses everyone in the room as 'babe', and while having her picture taken, she dances to Dusty Springfield, every now and then breaking into cackling laughter. And to be fair, she has a lot to be happy about. The day of her *Cosmopolitan* cover shoot, her song *Escapism* has just gone to number one on TikTok's 'UK Hot 50'. The following week, it will become a Top 20 single, before climbing even further into the Top 10 and reaching number two. This February, she will release her debut album, *My 21st Century Blues*. To say that it's been a long time coming is a gargantuan understatement. Of course, none of this is her first taste of success. She's had a number of hits before, but the difference is, this time round she's doing it as an independent artist. For the first time in her career, she's getting to do things on her own terms.

Some context: now 25, Raye signed her first record deal when she was 17. A handful of labels had been battling to sign her, and she eventually joined Polydor Records, home to the likes of Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo and Kendrick Lamar. At the

'Music is my way of being loud and owning the narrative'

time, both parties had many reasons to celebrate. Raye may have been young, but she had grit, talent and a fierce work ethic. She signed a four-album deal and couldn't wait to get started on her first. That was back in 2014. But seven years later, she still hadn't released her debut album.

Taking on the system

To the outside world, Raye seemed massively successful, but behind the scenes, she was in agony. Last summer, Raye shared her story in a series of tweets to her 60,000 followers. 'For the last seven days I have woken up crying my eyes out, not wanting to get out of bed and feeling so alone,' she wrote. 'These are the emotions we usually hide from social media and I have become such an expert at hiding my tears and my pain and I wanted to talk about it today.' She detailed all the ways in which she felt she had been exploited by her label for years: how they reportedly refused to let her release an album, and how she was made to change genres while 'albums on albums of music sat in folders collecting dust'. 'I'm done being a polite pop star,' she said.

For years, Raye had strived to prove herself so that her label would allow her to put out an album, but the green light never came. Instead, she released a handful of EPs while consistently collaborating with other artists as a songwriter or vocalist. Beautiful and introspective, her early releases straddled R&B and pop, showcasing her ingenuity as an artist. Meanwhile, her collaborations tended to be club-facing pop songs, such as *You Don't Know Me* with Jax Jones and a handful of others.

These tracks tended to reduce Raye to an auto-tuned vocal, but they charted high, had lots of radio play and led to regular songwriting gigs for the likes of Rita Ora and Mabel. Yet, when it came to Raye's own music – the chance to use her own voice – the label were stifling. 'I was being asked to write with some of the most incredible artists in the world,' she says. 'Meanwhile, I'm not taken seriously enough to govern and navigate my own success. What more did I have to do to prove myself? I did everything I could, and I still wasn't enough.

'Releasing music that says nothing means nothing… that was never why I decided to become an artist in the first place,' she continues. 'I found myself building a narrative I never wanted to build.' When I ask her what that looked like, she pauses. When she speaks again, it's with a deadpan irony. 'I make simple digestible music. I'm disposable. A rent-a-voice vocal that can be hired when needed for a big moment in chart music.'

The control her label exerted had a growing impact on her mental health, and in her lowest moments, she turned to drugs and alcohol. Addiction is a recurring theme on *My 21st Century Blues*. *Escapism* is about getting drunk and high on a night out to avoid feeling heartbroken. 'Doctor, doctor, have mercy on me,' she sings, her voice urgent and vulnerable. 'Take this pain away / You're asking me my symptoms, doctor / I don't wanna feel.' On TikTok, users – mostly young women – set videos of their experiences of self-medicating to the song. 'I think the reason people relate to the song – especially women – is that we all go through this stuff behind closed doors, but we talk about it like it's an inside joke. We say, "Oh, I need to get absolutely wasted." But why? What's going on to make us feel that way?'

In Raye's case, there was a lot going on. 'I just felt awful,' she says. 'I wasn't proud of my art or the way I was living… I wasn't proud of the woman I was becoming. There was a lot of substance abuse; I was numbing my feelings. I had started avoiding the people who genuinely wanted the best for me because I didn't want to have to look at my situation. I was spiralling.'

By 2021, Raye had landed her highest-charting single as a lead artist. Written with David Guetta and Joel Corry, *Bed* is stupidly catchy EDM. 'The song was huge. It was one of my "biggest moments",' she says. Fittingly, in the video, she plays a manufactured clone, churned out of a factory conveyor belt. 'I'm playing this, you know, "hot girl", hair done, smiling… meanwhile, I'm in recovery, I'm straight back to work, so I can't actually process any of the stuff I'd been going through. I fell straight back into the old habits and cycles I was trying to break.'

Luckily, after her tweets went viral, Raye was able to part ways with Polydor without the threat of lawyers. They released her from her contract, ending a drawn-out battle she'd been struggling with since 'the second [she] put pen to paper'. What followed was a period of slowing down, going sober and reconnecting with the loved ones she'd been avoiding. Somewhere along the way, the music Raye had been putting out had become so far removed from her genuine feelings that when she finally got the opportunity to release work as a solo artist, she first had to rediscover who exactly that artist was. 'The industry will say whatever it needs to say to get you to do what they want you to do. The manipulation behind closed doors is insane. I knew that was never my identity, but I was left with a lot of figuring out what was. Who am I, what do I wanna do, what do I wanna say?'

In the end, Raye made a radical return to her earliest approach to songwriting. *My 21st Century Blues* is the ultimate act of catharsis, full of big emotions expressed with revealing honesty. 'My biggest thing on this album is candidness,' she says. To point out that every song on her album is driven by strong feelings might seem like a no-brainer. Singers and songwriters have been sharing their experiences of love, sadness, joy and anger since the beginning of time. But after years of being forced to reduce herself, the album really packs a long-awaited emotional punch.

Take *Ice Cream Man*, a song about sexual assault and its long-lasting effects. It's devastating and heartbreaking, but there's also something empowering about Raye's angry declaration, 'I'm a woman / A very fucking brave strong woman.' 'When I think about the panic attacks, the PTSD… you realise that someone's actions become your burden to carry, and there is nowhere you can put it other than a therapy session. That's so isolating. It's

OPPOSITE PAGE: Dress, gloves, Miscreants; earrings, Ateliersó

THIS PAGE: (from left) Shoes, Koi; (right) top, Gestuz; skirt, Ganni; hat, Emma Brewin; rings, Ejing Zhang; shoes, Naked Wolfe
OPPOSITE PAGE: Gilet, Silvia Astore; shorts, Raquette; earrings, By Alona; silver ring, Ateliersó; resin band, Ejing Zhang; shoes, Koi

not the kind of thing you can bring to the surface easily. You can't hang out with a bunch of friends and be like, "So guys, do you want to talk about rape today? That's been on my mind a lot!" That song is me bringing it to the surface.'

She says misogyny and sexual assault are rampant in the music business. 'Every girl I know in this industry has some sort of story to tell me. The studio is such a vulnerable space. And if you say something, you create an enemy who will spread rumours or blacklist you – and you need those connections to open doors for yourself. Even though the people decide very much what's consumed on the outside, inside, the music industry is still very much a gatekept society.' When I ask her what advice she'd give to young women artists, the speed at which she reels off a list of precautions is telling. 'Trust your gut. Never go to the studio alone; always bring a friend or a chaperone. If you're going to drink, don't have more than two. Always tell someone where you're going to be. Don't sign anything before a lawyer has read it. If something feels wrong... leave.'

Shaping the future

Raye's exploitation has many faces, but her focus is on moving forwards. 'I have to find peace. I have to see the glass as half-full. Music is my way of being loud and owning the narrative,' she says. 'I've taken control on a very personal level to reach out to a lot of the people who have hurt me or crossed a line – I've confronted it head on.' She also found solace in reconnecting with her faith, which in part came from watching Aretha Franklin biopic, *Respect*, starring Jennifer Hudson. 'I cried and cried watching it. You see her losing herself and then coming back to God. I don't know if I would be here today without my faith,' she admits.

Her struggles provided a crash course in self-care. Nowadays, when she's not working, she spends a lot more time alone, walking her dog, Yoshi, or playing Nintendo Switch. Raye lives with her two sisters in south London. 'We're always holding each other up,' she says. Having confronted her own experiences of addiction and exploitation head on, she's becoming a passionate advocate for other women in similar situations. After tweeting about her ordeal, her inbox was flooded with messages from other artists. 'The stories you hear are just mad.'

In 2021, Raye joined fellow Black musicians Alexandra Burke, Nao and Sugababes' Keisha Buchanan, for Little Mix member Leigh-Anne Pinnock's BBC documentary, *Leigh-Anne: Race, Pop & Power*. 'Having the chance to unite with women who share the same sort of struggle was so powerful,' she says. In the film, Raye talks candidly about her experience of racism in the music industry, how she felt pressure to 'suppress' her Blackness in order to be more marketable, as well discussing colourism (her mother is Ghanaian-Swiss and her father is English). 'Men will roll their eyes, but it really is so much harder as a woman. Then you bring race into it, and it's just a completely different game entirely. The darker your skin, the tougher it is. We have miles and miles to go, even in the balance of output – if you look at an average UK Top 40, what's the ratio of Black women?'

Raye is still passionate about working with other artists, though rather than seeing herself cast as the 'hot girl vocalist', it's noticeable that her independent collaborations tend to skew towards other women (the only features on *My 21st Century Blues* are with Mahalia and 070 Shake). Recently, she's been in the studio with Halle Bailey and 90s R&B juggernaut Brandy. Raye is tight-lipped about these projects. 'It's not my place to talk about that private space,' she explains, though she is vocal about the impact writing for Beyoncé had on her. 'Beyoncé offered me real self-belief at the time I most needed it. She believed in my talent and in my voice, and I was so, so moved.'

As our time draws to a close, I ask Raye how she plans to celebrate the album release: when the day she's been waiting for finally comes. For the first time, Raye seems lost for words. 'I don't know if I'll celebrate,' she says with a grin. 'I'm really excited,' she qualifies. 'But I wanna release albums with an "s".' It makes sense. To Raye, *My 21st Century Blues* doesn't just mark the end of her fight; it represents the start of something new. She nods. 'Exactly. This really is just the beginning.' ◆

My 21st Century Blues is out 3 February

'Beyoncé gave me self-belief at the time I most needed it'

HAIR: SARAH NECIA. MAKE-UP: LAN

On the pull with

TikTok's sex influencers

A growing number of people are detailing every aspect of their sex lives online. But is it helping us to become more sexually liberated? Catriona Innes goes on a night out with the sex stars of TikTok to find out...

‘It’s her… it’s her…’

We hear them before we can see them. This group of lads, in tracksuits and dirty white trainers, shouting at us as we wander through the red-lit, uneven-underfoot, forever crowded streets of Soho…

‘It’s her,’ they repeat, loud enough for us to hear the next part. ‘That sluzza off TikTok.’

Sluzza, if you don’t know (I didn’t), essentially means slut. But Kali, the 25-year-old 5ft 3in blonde they’re referring to (aka kali.sluzza), isn’t offended. She turns around and starts bantering with the men. They’re enthralled by her. It’s Friday night, a whole evening of debauchery awaits, and this shouting – which to anyone else might be considered catcalling – is all just part of her brand. It’s men like this, and moments like these, that are paying her bills. And for the next few weeks I’m immersing myself in her world.

‘The kids are shouting at me, “Be a cat, be a cat,” and I’m sat there thinking, “I had two dicks in me last night…”’ This story of what happened after a memorable Wednesday night threesome, when Kali had to go straight to work as a nanny afterwards, sums up what it’s like to be in her company. It’s wild story after wild story, something that comes naturally to her (‘I’ve always been this way… I don’t know how I get myself into these situations’). When I play back the audio recording of our conversation later that week, it’s like listening to a night out with my friends. We’re crammed on to a wooden table, on a Friday night in Soho, joined by fellow TikTok creator, Rhys – aka chezablonde – who arrived in a red dress, cowboy boots and was told, almost immediately, by the next table how stunning she looks. My transcription is a mess of overlapping cries of delight and applause between the two at the smart, funny or on-point thing one or the other of them has just said.

The pair both joined TikTok in the last couple of years, with a simple intention: to have some fun. They’ve both since quit their jobs and make full-time earnings from creating TikTok content. At first they joined in on trends and slowly began to share stories about their lives. But as their content progressed, it also began to resonate. For Kali, it was other women who felt free to admit that, like her, they too enjoyed sex. For Rhys everything ‘blew up’ when she came out as trans, around six months into her time on the platform. ‘Everyone was like, “Oh my god, we didn’t know.” The backlash was really intense, I didn’t realise how strong it would be,’ she says. ‘But the more I spoke about it, the more I realised how much I was helping people. I had a lot of messages saying that I had helped them with their transition. I speak a lot about the stuff that isn’t necessarily spoken about: sex as a trans woman, what goes down in the bedroom and the fetishisation of trans women. Because no one really realises what it’s like behind closed doors.’

‘I started calling myself a “sluzza” as I was like, if I start calling myself a slut first then I’m owning it,’ adds Kali. ‘As time went on, I started to realise [from people reaching out] that no one was really speaking about this stuff [sex and female pleasure]. We don’t have these conversations in school or when we’re younger.’

It’s this that drew me to Kali’s TikTok in the first place. Her ‘Day In the Life Of A Single Sluzza’ videos, where she broadcasts to her 226k (and counting) following everything from receiving her STI health test results to *the* stories – like the time she slept with a rugby player and woke up with one of her acrylic nails missing, knowing that there was only one place it could be… Her videos fascinate me as they’re so far removed from the sexual landscape that I grew up in.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

I can remember, vividly, being 18 years old, hostel-hopping across Europe and encountering a man who wanted me. I'd seen him earlier, telling stories in various bars, manspreading to the max, cocksure in his ability to command a crowd. Around 1am, sticky with the heat of the day, we found ourselves raucously kissing in the social area of a Rome campsite. He ran an ice cube down my collarbone, following the trail of water with his lips. I was so turned on. He asked me back to his cabin. But I said no. Why? I didn't want to be considered a 'slut.' It was 2003 and, to me and my friends, that was the worst thing you could be. And now, aged 37, I'm sitting here regretting that – as I listen to Kali tell a story of another threesome, this time in an Ibizan sex hotel with a glass bath. 'It was a truly delicious experience,' she says. Her and Rhys's life is the adventure I chose not to embark on, as I let the judgement of others – of who and what a woman should be – influence those formative years.

But have things changed much in the years since? As, while we're seemingly living in a more sexually positive landscape, particularly when it comes to exploring our sexualities, I question, is that really the case? The idea of reclaiming 'slut' is, of course, nothing new. We've had the SlutWalks, first organised in 2011, where people take to the streets to call for an end to victim-blaming and the slut-shaming of sexual assault victims (as still a woman's sexual activity and clothing are brought into these cases). The way this pair live – loudly and unashamedly – also reminds me of the 'ladettes' of the 90s – a time when the likes of Zoe Ball and Denise van Outen became tabloid regulars, purely for drinking and having sex 'like men'. They were both celebrated and criticised and, it appears, slut-shaming has not gone away. (Kali tells me she receives countless messages from people telling her she'll 'never be a wife or a mother.') While some TikTok algorithms will push you to sex-positive content where female pleasure reigns supreme, swipe on another day and you could be led to copycat Andrew Tates saying that women who've slept around are damaged goods. The same attitudes prevail, they're just being disseminated across new platforms, in new ways. So, how do you break through the noise and find a way to enjoy sex – casual or not – on your own terms? I had a feeling this wave of TikTok stars might have the answer.

THE BODY COUNTS

Shards of disco-ball light are dancing off the face of Kenna Bethany (aka kenna_bethany) as she tells me how, recently on a night out, someone came up to her to tell her, 'I came out because of you!' before introducing Kenna to her girlfriend. The 24-year-old says that TikTok's algorithm helped her find her niche, as she quickly learned what videos performed the best – those where she was most open and honest about sex.

'So, I kept seeing a lot of this idea that when women [date each other] all they want to do is hold each other's hands and bake bread in the woods. And I was like, "No! I want to fuck them,"' she says laughing, as I can hear karaoke start in the next room. 'That's what I talk about on TikTok. It's that with some nightlife, mental health, autism and kink thrown in.' Her videos are a mix of humour, straight-to-camera pieces educating on aspects of the BDSM community, and then there's the 'thirst traps – which are just for me to feel good about myself'. She also highlights great LGBTQ+ nightlife spaces, such as the one we're sitting in – She, a bar in London's

> **'I started calling myself a "sluzza" as I was like, if I start calling myself a slut first, then I'm owning it'**

Soho. 'The way my brain processes information – it's a neurodiverse thing – is that I like organised information. I want to give complete and cohesive explanations [on topics] and I'm quite articulate. That works on TikTok,' she explains. 'I do feel very proud that I've created a safe space where people feel they can talk to me about coming out, as I think whatever your experience is, it's never completely smooth sailing. But it's also this space where it's not all political, sometimes the stories are just, "I went to this club and I met this girl and she was really hot and I got with her." That's why I talk about gay clubs, saying these are the best places to snog a girl.'

Yet, as all three have come to realise, when it comes to sharing sex openly, for anyone to access, the personal quickly becomes political. The power of talking about pleasurable sex should not be underestimated. 'I like that [on TikTok] we've created this space where we can say, "It's okay for us to like sex, here's how to like it,"' says Kenna, who also notes that gay sex in particular is so much more focused on pleasure. 'We've torn up the "rule book" and created sexual experiences based on what feels good.' She's also non-monogamous and shares those experiences, too.

When Rhys shares that she's had her first orgasm since her transition, it's not – as some might see it – 'TMI', but instead showcases that trans people deserve brilliant sex where they feel neither used nor fetishised. While Kali choosing to sleep with someone on the first date – rather than the third (a tactic her friends say will lead to a man respecting her more) – is breaking down the Madonna/whore complex, the idea that men only want to marry 'pure, virginal' women, first coined by Freud and still very much prevalent today. 'If he's going to choose how he views me based on what point I have sex with him, he's not someone I'd want to be with in the first place,' she explains. As for the judgement she faces? 'You're not on this earth to live for anybody but yourself.' They're sharing the real side of sex, complete with ups and downs, rather than the often misleading portrayals of TV, films and porn.

Some have argued that TikTok's obsession with body count (the number of people you've slept with) and 'having sex for the story' is leading women to push themselves into sexual situations that they're not really comfortable with. But is that really the fault of TikTok and the women on it? Or is it indicative of much wider cultural attitudes and trends? We're living in an age where, as Kenna says, 'the impact porn has had in the bedroom is overwhelming'. Vanilla sex, she tells me, has started to be shamed on the platform – whereas being choked has become the default.

WHAT IS GOOD SEX?

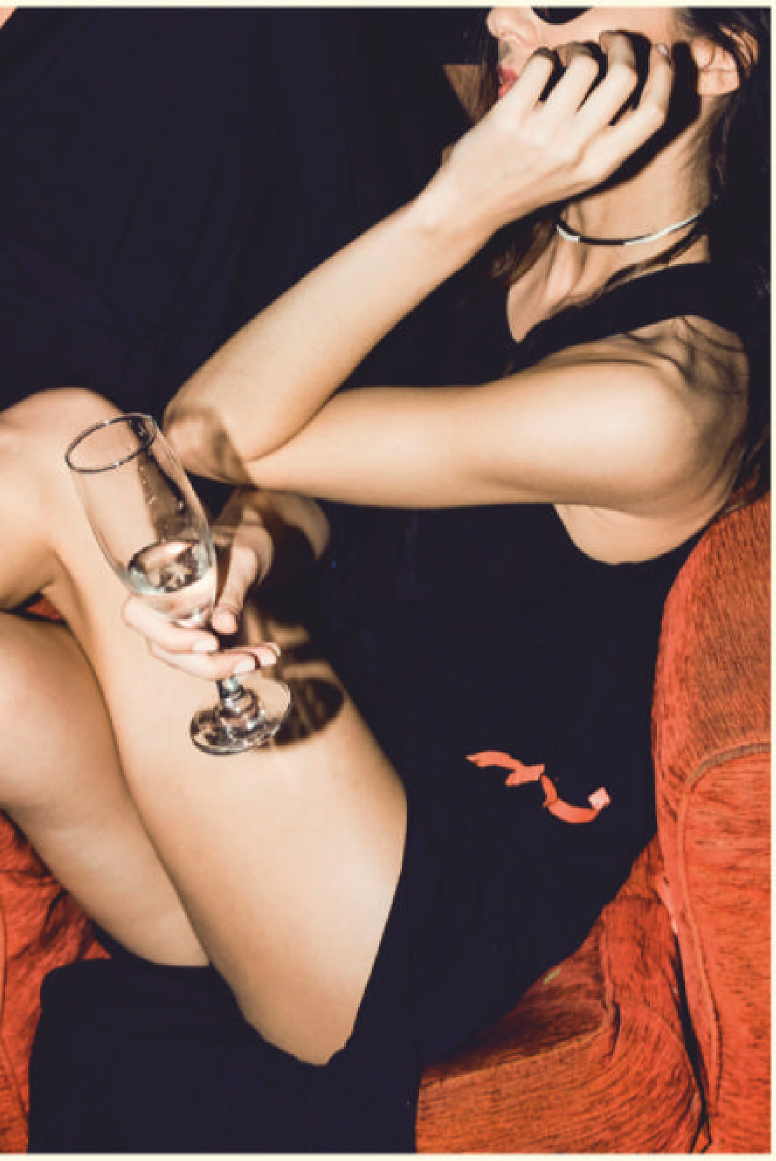
In her Ted talk, Peggy Orenstein – who, for her *New York Times* bestseller *Girls & Sex*, travelled America for three years interviewing girls aged 15 to 20 about their sex lives – details that research has found that young women were more likely than young men to use their partner's satisfaction as a sign of 'good sex'. Young women also defined bad sex differently, with 30% citing pain in sexual encounters, using words such as 'depressing' and 'humiliating' – words that young men never used.

Adding to this, research carried out by campaign group We Can't Consent To This found that a third of women under 40 had experienced unwanted slapping, spitting or choking during sex. And while anyone who enjoys rough sex should be able to pursue that in a healthy, consensual way without shame, when it comes to sexual liberation in a world where porn, and particularly violent porn, is so easily accessible, is it really as simple as

going out and sleeping with whoever you want, whenever you want?

'Whether you're in a relationship with someone for 20 minutes or 20 years, the rules for caring for and being cared for by that person should be the same,' explains Orenstein over Zoom. 'Yet, too often, the way women have been socialised keeps undermining that. It's very hard to assert your desires. When I talk to younger girls, their number one question is: "how do I say no without hurting someone's feelings?" Going out and saying "this is what I want, this is what I need" is taking control of that. But it's not enough. [Those doing so] shouldn't have to be doing it alone, there needs to be a wider conversation in schools and in homes about sex and female pleasure.'

Particularly as sex education is so poor that those talking online may not have had adequate sex education themselves. And all three of the women in this feature are more than aware that they're having people flock to them because they're filling in a gap created by a lack of honest discussion in society. 'Young people are bombarded with fake images of sexual pleasure that are wildly inaccurate, whether that's from mainstream media or pornography, yet still sexual pleasure is removed from the conversation at home and in schools,' explains Orenstein. '[Through education and socialisation] we're denying women knowledge of their own bodies. We wouldn't deny someone the knowledge of their own elbow! This is an artefact of fear around sexuality and it's totally misguided as every piece of research shows that, particularly for young girls, the more they know about their body, the better the decisions they make for themselves. [Alongside] being able to recognise whether they're in an [abusive] situation.'



'I didn't know anything about the female anatomy until two weeks before my [gender-affirming] operation,' says Rhys. 'My sister had to draw me a diagram!' While Kali adds that the lack of conversation surrounding female masturbation has to be linked to the shame surrounding enjoying sex, particularly as the comments she receives criticising her lifestyle are often not just from men, but women, too. For Kenna, she's incredibly aware of her responsibility when discussing BDSM on a platform where anyone can get an account from the age of 13. (In its community guidelines, TikTok says: 'We strive to create a platform that feels welcoming and safe. We do not allow nudity, pornography, or sexually explicit content on our platform. We also prohibit content depicting or supporting non-consensual sexual acts, the sharing of non-consensual intimate imagery, and adult sexual solicitation.')

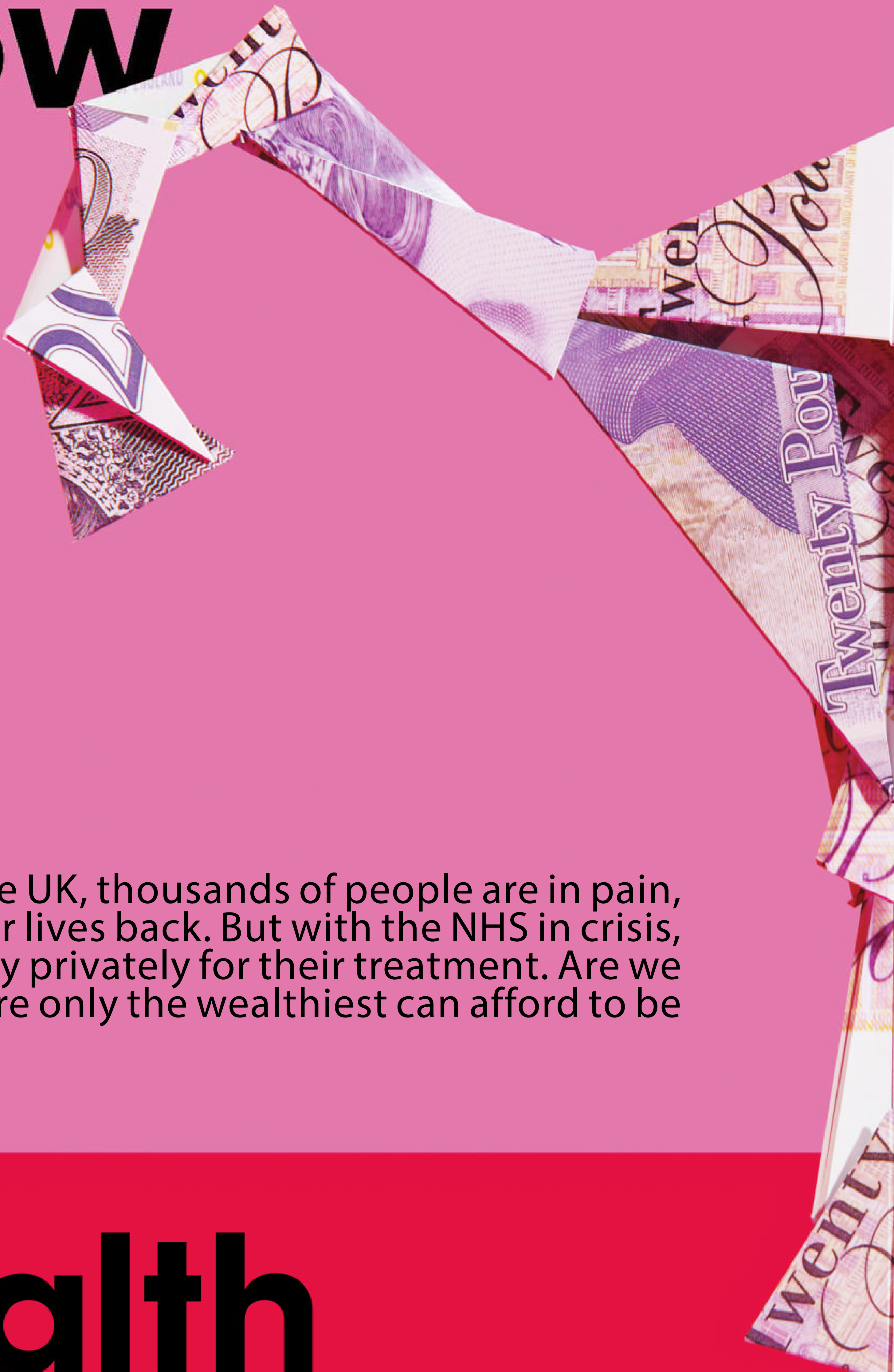
'I do feel a responsibility,' she says, detailing how when she first discovered BDSM, while she absolutely loved it, the person who she entered into a BDSM relationship with is now being prosecuted for abuse. 'Age does make a difference, when you do things [when you're younger], I wasn't questioning anything, I'd go home and say to myself, "I felt a bit weird about that but he said it was fine..."' It's why she wants to share her advice on what she's learned, through experiences both good and bad, on how to pinpoint what can be enjoyable when it comes to sex.

'If he's going to choose how he views me based on what point I have sex with him, he's not someone I'd want to be with in the first place'

Ultimately, it's important to remember that when you're listening to one person's account of their sex life, that's exactly what it is. One person's account. No one should watch a TikTok and think: 'I'm going to go out and do exactly that and I'll have as good a time as that person.' Sex is entirely individual. But what people should take away from this new wave of social media stars is putting your own pleasure first.

When I look back at the sex I was having in my younger years, it wasn't that I was some wannabe Sandra Dee turning down every man who wanted to sleep with me. But I seemed to choose the ones who put themselves first. It was almost as if I was frightened of my own pleasure. Back then, my sexual experiences tended to be me going along with what the man wanted – even when I was in pain. I was raised in a sex-positive household (my mum told me about masturbation) and yet the societal idea that his wants always came first sank in, preventing me from living a life I wanted to at the time. And it's clear that those messages have not gone away, and may have – with such easy access to porn – got worse. Orenstein told me that so many of the women in their teens she spoke to were giving blow jobs as 'the man expects it' and a blow job 'isn't as big a deal' as sex. So Kenna, Kali and Rhys showing the importance of listening to what *you* want, not what others expect of you, is surely moving us in the right direction. ◆

How is health



Across the UK, thousands of people are in pain,
them their lives back. But with the NHS in crisis,
pay privately for their treatment. Are we
where only the wealthiest can afford to be

much your worth?

waiting for endometriosis surgery that could give many are faced with having to go into debt to sleepwalking into a new gender health gap, cured? Sarah Harris investigates…

ARTWORK: PETER CROWTHER AT DEBUT ART

She'd been battling for 14 years. The pain, sharp twangs of agony that left her bedbound for days, had arrived every month since she was 14. But it was so hard to get an answer to why she felt this way, never mind a solution.

In her early twenties, doctors told her that it was IBS and the stress of her job. So she quit. Yet the anguish did not alleviate.

Her symptoms – severe cramping, heavy blood loss and painful bowel movements – remained. By the time Jessica's endometriosis was diagnosed at the age of 29, via laparoscopic surgery on the NHS, it was 2020 and the height of the pandemic. The surgeons were able to burn away the endometriosis they could see, spread across her bowels and pelvis, but they weren't qualified to remove the endometriotic tissue from the root and Jessica was still in pain.

The only answer was seeing a consultant for advice on next steps. The wait? Up to 90 weeks. Instead, she opted to go private; she could be seen in less than a month if she spent £80. The appointment confirmed she needed surgery. The wait on the NHS was said to be 'a couple of years'. If she went private, she could receive the surgery in a few weeks. But it would cost her. She was quoted £7,000 – money she didn't have. But her physical symptoms were so severe that it was completely destroying her mental health. She had to find a way to pay.

I know Jessica's pain. Not that long ago, in September 2021, I was sobbing in my mum's lap, clenching and twisting the bed sheets as my ovaries throbbed and agony radiated through my pelvis. Endometriosis, for those of you who don't know first-hand, is a chronic condition in which tissue similar to that found in the lining of your uterus begins to grow in other parts of your body. Affecting an estimated one in 10 women in the UK, it is the second most common gynaecological condition after uterine fibroids.

I'd been told two months before that my most recent ultrasound had found adhesions and growths on both my ovaries, as well as my uterus. 'You need another surgery,' my NHS gynaecologist said casually, as if I hadn't already trialled a plethora of hormonal interventions and painkillers. As if I hadn't already *had* two extensive endometriosis surgeries in five years. And as if I hadn't been experiencing debilitating pain, heavy bleeding and a lack of control over my body, as well as my life, for well over a decade.

Even worse: I was looking at a wait of over a year and a half, in comparison to 'just' nine months when I had my first surgery as a second-year undergraduate student in 2017. Back then, there was a never-ending stream of blood coming out of me during my period and sometimes in between, and the pain was so bad that I was unable to attend lectures, let alone go on nights out or catch up with friends over a coffee. My student years were spent with a hot-water bottle glued to my stomach, as I made hourly trips to the bathroom to change my blood-soaked sanitary pad.

Both times the wait felt impossible. While consecutive surgeries had eased the pain for a short time, it would come back within months, requiring further surgery. Thankfully, my parents were able to pay for private procedures (I'd tried various other treatments on the NHS), but what would have happened if they couldn't?

The pressure of the pandemic understandably saw millions of 'non-emergency' surgeries and appointments cancelled, with a record seven million people in England reportedly waiting for hospital treatment as of August 2022. Among them are hundreds of thousands of those struggling with gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) revealed that gynaecology waiting lists have soared by 59%, with 570,000 women in the UK waiting to be seen. Data collected by leading charity Endometriosis UK found that 17% of patients who had their NHS appointments cancelled or postponed had since sought private endometriosis care due to waiting times. I'm not sure what's more worrying – that 17% felt they had no choice but to pay for treatment, or that the other 83% remain on that waiting list, suffering. After all, private healthcare isn't an option for everyone, with surgery costing between £3,000 and £10,000. A socioeconomic healthcare divide is fast developing and, it seems, women are at the sharp end.

You're on the (never-ending) list

'It got to the point where I had no autonomy over my body,' Yasmeen Thantrey tells me, of the point when her symptoms were so bad that, as an art student and part-time nanny, she was missing classes and had to be ready to leave at a moment's notice. 'I would have to get taxis when travelling for an extended time. I could be out, then have a flare-up and have to go straight home.'

Despite her dire need, the waiting list to see an NHS gynaecologist was two years. 'There was no way I could spend another two months in severe pain, let alone two years,' she says. So she booked an appointment with a private endometriosis specialist, who said she also needed an MRI to assess the extent of the condition. The £700 cost forced Yasmeen into her overdraft.

It was a last-ditch attempt that took her to the very edge of financial safety. Having just begun her master's degree and with little job security in her part-time work, there was no way she could afford to take on any more debt. Then Yasmeen was told by her gynaecologist that, given the severity of her condition, the surgery she needed would cost thousands. 'I didn't have a full-

time job. I was studying, so getting a loan [to afford the private care] just wasn't an option,' she says.

She joined the NHS waiting list, but due to the Covid backlog, it would be over a year before she could be seen. Yasmeen had no choice but to suffer in silence. 'Waiting for surgery is a whole other ball game. That's horrific in itself,' she says. After a year and a half on the waiting list, she eventually had the treatment and is now recovering.

For Jessica, who lives in Wakefield, the wait was too long. 'It was maddening being in that much pain, having to wait to even see a consultant,' she says. Jessica is now paying off £550 a month, with high interest rates, after choosing to get her surgery done privately.

'It was the only option that wouldn't completely destroy my wellbeing,' she says. 'I'm an active person and I do triathlons, which is important for my mental health. I would have had to give that up.' Jessica's surgeon found that her endometriosis had caused parts of her bowel and ovary to attach to her hip, causing pain when she exercised. Luckily, they were able to free them and give Jessica her quality of life back.

It got to the point where I no longer had any autonomy over my own body

Mind the gap

There are certain phrases anyone with endometriosis is used to hearing, such as 'it's just period pain' and 'it's part of being a woman'. It takes a staggering seven and a half years, on average, to receive an endometriosis diagnosis, and these old tropes are partly why.

Tori Ford, feminist health researcher at Oxford University and founder of Medical Herstory (an international not-for-profit aiming to eliminate sexism and stigma from healthcare), explains to me why this could be. 'Currently and historically, women's pain is more likely to be dismissed as hysterical, overly emotional, dramatic and untrustworthy in medical settings.' Plus, Ford adds, 'Conditions that disproportionately (or differently) affect people who are assigned female at birth are both chronically underfunded and under-researched.' Despite the fact that endometriosis is often seen as a health

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issue that only impacts the lives of women, it can affect trans and non-binary people, too.

Vasileios Minas, consultant gynaecologist and endometriosis specialist at Ashford & St Peter's Hospital, agrees. 'Society seems to have accepted the concept that women will suffer during their periods. I believe that healthcare professionals are partially responsible for this false perception. It is therefore our role as healthcare professionals – our responsibility and obligation as a society – to stand next to women with endometriosis and advocate for them to receive the care they need.'

But this care is complex, and so funding – and proper training – is essential. 'Endometriosis is one of the hardest problems to deal with in gynaecology. Some of these operations can last six hours or longer,' says Dr Minas. 'It takes at least five years to train and produce a competent endometriosis surgeon.'

It ultimately comes down to a reasonable expectation of quality of life, explains Dr Minas. 'The reality remains that endometriosis rarely threatens life, as opposed to, say, cancer or cardiovascular disease – conditions that have received a lot more research funding and attention. It threatens *quality* of life, but rarely life itself. Of course, many, including myself, would argue that having a reasonable quality of life is extremely important and, on some occasions, perhaps as important as life itself.' According to a survey by the RCOG of women waiting for gynaecology care, 80% said their mental health has worsened due to the wait and more than three-quarters (77%) reported that their ability to work or take part in social activities had been negatively impacted.

And while the gender health gap widens, so too does the wealth gap. The same RCOG study showed how much gynaecology waiting lists vary, with the north-west having eight out of the 10 worst-affected Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). The study showed that some of these hardest hit CCGs have waiting lists that are over five times longer than those with the lowest.

Carys Williams, from Bridgend in South Wales, has been fighting her battle since she was 10 years old. Now 29, she spent her teen years and early twenties 'going back and forth to the hospital'. Carys begged her doctors to do something, but instead they kept sending her home with new forms of contraception to try. 'I developed really severe anxiety because it got to the point where I just couldn't cope any more,' she says.

Carys was able to get herself referred to see a gynaecologist at an endometriosis centre in Cardiff and was put on the waiting list for surgery. But when she asked them how long she'd be waiting for the operation, she was met with a response that shocked her: six years.

Free healthcare is meaningless if it takes years of agony to access

Carys knew something had to be done so that she could regain control over her life. With the help of her partner, she began to look into going private for the surgery, but when she phoned the hospital to ask for a quote, they told her that the surgery would cost £6,000.

Like Jessica, Carys was unable to afford the surgery outright and decided to go for the finance option, paying £600 a month. But this meant her life plans took a huge hit. 'It's come at such a weird time because my partner and I have been trying to save for a house, like most people in their late twenties. But now we've had to move in with my mum.'

Unlike England and Scotland, who between them have 54 NHS-run endometriosis centres, Wales is home to only one centre that is accredited by The British Society for Gynaecological Endoscopy. This means that thousands of women from all over Wales are having to travel long distances just to ensure they get the treatment they need.

Unfortunately for Carys, the endometriosis surgery hasn't completely relieved her pain and she finds herself struggling. 'I'm still taking morphine daily,' she says.

While my symptoms and Jessica's have, thankfully, eased, there's no guarantee that surgery will work. Certain forms have been reported to have an impact and improve quality of life, but it varies for each individual. And even if the symptoms are alleviated, there's always a risk that they could come back at any time. An article in the journal *Women's Health* suggested that the recurrence rate of endometriosis could be anywhere from 6% to 67% following surgery. This adds further stress for those who have been forced to choose private treatment, knowing that this is a financial burden they may have to shoulder for the rest of their lives.

A wider problem

With views overlooking Buckingham Palace, the brand-new 184-bed, eight-storey Cleveland Clinic hospital in central London is said to be marking a new era of luxury healthcare in Britain. Then there's the surge of digital GP platforms, such as Livi, Push Doctor and Babylon, where you can pay £49 to see a GP almost straight away. We're in the midst of a private healthcare boom and it's not hard to see why. But what does it mean for us as patients?

The impact on the NHS is still being debated by many people. Some argue that it helps to alleviate the pressure, perhaps reducing lengthy waiting lists; last year, patients paid for 250,000 private treatments that the NHS didn't have to carry out. Others argue it's private companies that are playing a big role in the current NHS recruitment crisis, as staff are choosing to head to them instead. While there are many reasons for NHS staffing shortages, the fact is that as of June 2022, there were more than 130,000 unfilled vacancies in secondary care in England – the largest number since June 2019.

Many fear that we're heading into a dangerous healthcare gap, with top-tier healthcare only accessible to the wealthy. While insurance – either paid for personally or through work – means not everyone will have to resort to their savings or a credit card to fund treatment, 69,000 people in the UK did self-fund their medical treatment in the final three months of last year – a 39% rise on the same period pre-pandemic. 'Funding surgery or other healthcare privately can speed up treatment, or give access to treatment that otherwise wouldn't be available, so it's not surprising people may borrow to do this,' says Sue Anderson, head of media at debt charity StepChange. 'However, it's important to remember that the borrowing will still carry the same kinds of risks any other borrowing would. If using credit stretches your finances to the point of not having enough to cover your essentials (food, fuel, household bills, etc), it could leave you vulnerable to problem debt in the future, so try to make sure that it will be affordable. For anyone worried about their finances, or struggling with debt, a charity such as StepChange can offer free and impartial debt advice, tailored to your personal circumstances.'

There are certainly no quick and simple answers for a system that's battling both underfunding and outdated gender stereotypes, but there is help out there. Endometriosis UK offers great resources, and there's information on the right about how to get a diagnosis and chase up waiting times. In the meantime? Let's hope (and vote) for a government that prioritises the NHS and knows that free healthcare is completely meaningless if it takes years of agony to access. ◆

Think you may have endometriosis? Here are some tips on how to begin your diagnosis journey:

Track your cycle and symptoms. Include how much blood you're losing on average and how long or regular your periods are, as well as spotting and pain during sex or ovulation.

Be open with your GP. Sharing intimate details may seem a little uncomfortable, but if you think something isn't right, discuss it with your doctor. Remember, they've seen it all before.

People often think that endometriosis is a period disorder, but the truth is that endometriosis can occur in any part of your body. Make sure you mention any other symptoms you might have, such as a persistent cough when you're on your period or frequent urinary tract infections.

If your GP won't take your concerns seriously, ask them why. Emphasise the impact that these symptoms are having on your life. Tell them what you want. Your GP won't be able to diagnose you with endometriosis, but they can refer you to a gynaecologist who can investigate further if they think something is wrong.

If you're already on the waiting list to see a gynaecologist but it's taking a long time, chase up the hospital. Ask them exactly how long it will be, so you can get a clear idea. In cases where symptoms or circumstances have worsened, they might be able to expedite your appointment. You can also ask your GP to write to them.

HOW TO CONVERT
VEGAN

INTO THE

UNKNOWN

How often are the intricate lives of women reduced to hashtags, trends and buzzwords? But behind every cost of living, #vanlife-ing, quiet-quitting headline is a person. Here's how real women are coping right now, told through six stories…

WORDS: ISABELLE ARON

PHOTOGRAPHY: EMLI BENDIXEN

‘My company is trialling a four-day week and it’s game-changing’

HANNAH

34, humanitarian action officer, Inverness-shire

It’s amazing the difference one extra day can bring. I just don’t get that Sunday-night dread, as I feel I’ve had enough time to rest. My three-day weekend begins with some life admin on Fridays, and then for the rest of the weekend, I’ll see friends and family or go wild camping in the Scottish Highlands. I love it – the quiet at night, the darkness, the sounds of trees and wildlife, sitting by a fire and going for a swim in the morning. You can focus on what’s in front of you, rather than being pulled in all directions by the digital world.

It didn’t use to be this way. My whole career has been spent working on human rights issues. Previously, I lived and worked in east Africa for around 10 years, but a few years ago, I decided to move back to the Highlands, where I grew up. I love my job, which involves working with various community groups to coordinate humanitarian efforts around the world, but it can be overwhelming. It’s the kind of work that you feel you can’t put down, because people are relying on you. For that reason, I’ve gone through periods of burnout that have contributed to other mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. Splitting my week into three days and four days feels like a far better balance in terms of life versus work. I feel that it accommodates the whole person – it’s acknowledging that you are more than your work.

‘We can only afford to have two meals a day’

CHLOE

21, student, East Anglia

Two years ago, I would often donate to food banks – just basic things such as pasta and tinned food. That would be impossible now. I’ve even considered using one, as my partner and I – we live together – can only afford to have two meals a day. We might even need to go down to having just one.

The cost of living crisis is terrifying for students. Usually, when you move away, you just have the fear of being without your mum and dad and wondering what you’ll make for dinner. Now, it’s: can I afford to make anything for dinner? People think students just waste all their money on alcohol, drugs and new trainers, but I don’t think that’s the case. It definitely isn’t for me. I spend a lot of time thinking about money – more than I think is normal.

I’m currently on placement in my third year studying social work. It’s full-time working hours but you’re not paid. I have a loan to cover my fees, which is around £9,000 per year. My maintenance loan is around £8,500 and that’s for the year, it’s essentially your income. I’m considered lucky by my peers – because I come from a lone-parent household, I get the highest maintenance loan. I used to have a part-time job, but I was made redundant recently. The only hours I can work are on weekends or evenings. Every student wants those hours, so it’s quite difficult to find another job that fits.

I was inspired to become a social worker by my mother. When she had me, she was a nursery nurse on quite a low income and trained to become a probation officer so she could support me better. I saw how you can make a difference in people’s lives. With a lot of the people we visit, we’re helping them with their finances. It’s ironic that you’re supporting them, but you know that, secretly, you’re also having a really tough time.

The one thing that makes the placement doable is that I can see the impact I’m having. We had a young man who was struggling to take care of himself and, after our visit, he had all these goals. Sometimes, just seeing someone have that ambition within their own life is so rewarding, it brightens your day.

‘I am embracing loud quitting’

CHARLYNN

31, diversity and inclusion manager, London

‘What’s going on? We feel like your behaviour has changed.’ I was still doing my job, competently, I just wasn’t doing it enthusiastically. My manager had noticed and was pulling me up on it. The thing is, I had good reason to take a step back – I liked my job and I had been putting in so much effort, to hardly any reward. I’ve always been taught that if you work hard, you’ll get to where you want to go. But I kept seeing people get promoted who were doing what I thought was the bare minimum. That was the first time I realised that it wasn’t enough to just do good work to progress.

This was a few years ago before the term ‘quiet quitting’ had been coined. I had no motivation, and I felt burned out, exhausted and disappointed. I think when people have an idea of who they want in certain roles, it’s hard to shake that.

The type of work that I do is quite personal to me because it’s about making sure that everyone has access to what they want to do as a career. Age, gender and ethnicity have been both obstacles and propellers in my career. When I was talking to people as a recruiter, people could relate to me, being younger, Black and a woman. I could engage with different audiences more than some of my other colleagues. Now, being a senior Black woman on my team, I can bring a perspective that other people don’t have. But at times in my career, I’ve felt like I had to prove myself in a way that perhaps other people didn’t..

As quiet quitting didn’t work out for me, I decided to move on – I put feelers out and got headhunted, which eventually led me to where I am now. For me, trying to ‘quiet quit’ made the situation worse. I love my current job, but if I ever felt undervalued in the future, I would ‘loudly quit’ – I’d just leave and find another job.

‘Van life felt like a way to pay off my debt’

LAUREN

30, copywriter, wherever her van takes her

They were right there. Jumping through the waves directly in front of us. I was watching, cup of tea in hand, a shoal of dolphins flinging themselves gleefully out of the Scottish sea. We’d parked our van on the edge of the beach for a few nights – it’s our home now. There’s little space but this new life of ours makes me happy in a way I could never have imagined nearly two years ago.

I was working in marketing for an estate agent in a world I found toxic and competitive. At one interview, I walked in with this big afro and one of them just looked at me as if to say, ‘Why are you here?’ That was the vibe. I was going into the office every day and counting down the clock.

I’ve been in debt most of my adult life. At first, it was because of my own stupid impulses. I have ADHD and, if I’m feeling down, my impulse spending is more likely to come out. My job was making it worse. Once, I was having an awful day at work and, in the evening, I bought a £450 TV on my credit card. We didn’t need a new TV. Even when my mindset with money improved, I was in a hole that I couldn’t get out of. Then Covid hit and we all got pay cuts, so I took out more credit cards. It became a vicious cycle.

Moving into our van (we previously used it for weekend trips) full-time felt like a way to pay off my debt, so I convinced my partner and we handed in our notice on our house and started selling all our things. I needed my laptop for work and the iPad we use as a TV. Pretty much everything else went.

The day that we moved into the van, I was offered my current role, as a copywriter for Quirky Campers. Everyone works remotely, so I’m not the odd one out. As we travel around the UK, moving on every few days, it can be hard to find a routine. I’ve got to think of practical things such as internet signal and where I’ll be for meetings. My partner works as a freelancer on festival builds. If we’re both working from the van, we alternate between the table and the bed, depending on how we’re feeling. I have an outside table and, if it’s sunny, I work outside.

There are, of course, tricky days. We have a compost loo that needs emptying, which is… not fun. And if the van breaks down, it’s a challenge financially, but you have to fix it, you don’t have any choice. Thankfully, other parts of van life are cheaper, so I have paid off a lot of my debt. And my entire perspective on life has changed. I used to be the most materialistic person. At first, I was nervous about getting rid of all our stuff, but once I started doing it, it felt addictive. We may have a smaller space, but I no longer feel trapped.

'I felt empowered to strike because you're fighting for what you deserve'

TAYLA

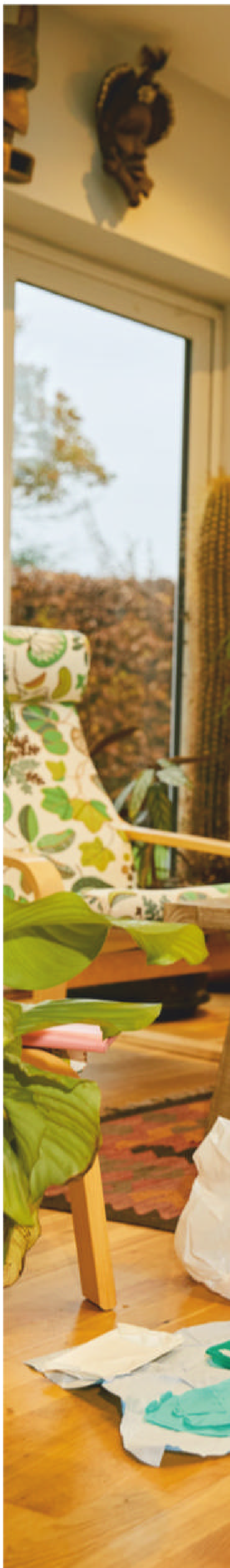
34, bus driver, The Wirral

I spent much of my summer on a fold-out director's chair, sitting in an alcove by a bus station. When I agreed to go on strike, I had no idea what it would involve – my union rep said, 'Just turn up on the picket line and show your face' – and that's pretty much what I did all month.

It can be lonely driving a bus, so it was nice to meet other drivers and get to know them. The majority of the public were supportive, some even brought snacks for us, but others did hurl abuse at the picket line. I can understand why the public may have been a bit peeved, but I don't think everyone saw it from the drivers' side. We were fighting to increase our wages to £15 per hour. I don't think bus drivers are valued highly enough. We provide a vital service. I felt empowered to strike because you're fighting for what you deserve. If you don't fight, no one's going to fight for you.

After the strike, I was approached to be a union equality rep. I'm excited at the prospect of trying something new. We got the pay rise that we asked for in the end. I was with my colleagues when we got the news and there was definitely some cheering. I like having a routine, so when we knew we had the deal, I was glad to go back to work.

I think our strikes have paved the way for other industries to follow suit, such as those in nursing and those working for Royal Mail. It's a shame that you have to strike to get what you deserve. We're not just doing it for the bus drivers. We're doing it for everyone – to help the younger generations, so they get a better wage.



‘NHS staffing pressures mean I feel like I can’t do the job that I signed up for’

FLO

22, community nurse, Devon

He was struggling to breathe. This man, who must have only been in his early forties, couldn’t inhale properly. It shouldn’t have been this way – but it was. Covid struck halfway through my nurse training and turned everything upside down. I was employed as a student nurse in A&E and we had ambulance after ambulance arriving. Every morning, we were told how many people had died in the hospital from Covid.

Pre-Covid, student nurses were swaddled in bubble wrap – that got torn off as soon as the pandemic came. Patients would have all these questions about Covid and, because it was so early on, no one had the answers. If you have a disease that is killing more and more people each day, all you want is to be surrounded by your loved ones and have that reassurance. Instead, we had to provide that for other people. By the time we qualified, most of my cohort felt burned out and we hadn’t even officially started.

I’ve been qualified as a nurse for over a year now. Community nurses provide pretty much the same care as hospital nurses, but we go to people’s houses. Compared with other nursing avenues, my job is quite flexible. I work one weekend a month, but I mostly work weekdays and finish at 4pm. Everywhere is under pressure, but seeing the intensity of the hospitals as a student made me think: I’m not going to work there.

I still feel rushed off my feet. Because of staffing pressures, there’s been an increase in workload and I feel like I can’t do the job that I signed up for. I don’t know how many tens of thousands of vacancies there are in the NHS now. In my team alone, we’re almost a quarter of the team down. I went into nursing to care for people, but often I’m leaving patients’ homes with a sense of guilt because I’ve not been able to provide the level of care that I’ve been trained to provide. Because of the way staffing is at the moment, it’s becoming a bit of a conveyor belt.

Nursing gives me a sense of purpose. Being able to help others is rewarding, even in the really tough moments. It’s impossible not to become connected to the patients and it affects me when we lose them.

The only thing that’s going to solve the staffing crisis is better retainment and more recruitment, and I can’t see that happening unless there are pay rises. Nurses don’t go into nursing for the money, but the fact that we can’t adequately care for people makes it harder to stay in the profession.

If I was working in a hospital, I probably would have quit by now. But I’m passionate about community nursing and I’m so proud to work for the NHS. I don’t think many nurses want to walk away from the profession, but they’re having to do it because they’re at breaking point. ◆

The great filler debate

Should you have the right to alter your appearance if you're struggling with mental health problems? What if those problems are caused *by* your appearance? A new government proposal suggests mandatory mental health background tests before any non-invasive cosmetic procedure. But will it safeguard those who need it, or cause further issues?

Beauty journalist Keeks Reid investigates

GUTTER CREDIT

GUTTER CREDIT

‘Well…’ I say… ‘What would you do to my face?’

The man in front of me furrows his brow and begins to list off how he would tweak my cheeks, nose, chin and jaw. It’s so much more extensive than I’d thought, amounting to nine areas to be injected and thousands of pounds dropped. I leave the clinic with a trivial amount of smile line filler and his list playing over and over in my head. Later, I find myself frowning in each mirror in my home, tracing over lines in my forehead, touching my chin, thinking of when my next appointment could be.

You could look at this scenario two ways: one, that man – an aesthetic doctor with a decade of experience – is cashing in on my vulnerabilities and pointing out ‘flaws’ that aren’t even there. Or, you could see it as him offering a solution that could help me feel more confident in myself. Either way, what I do with that list should always be my choice, right? Or should it? Evidence has begun to show that ‘tweakments’, such as filler and anti-wrinkle injections, not only change appearances but can leave people – particularly vulnerable young people – with a host of mental health problems. I set out to get under the skin of beauty’s latest, and extremely complex, debate…

When I was a beauty ingenue, in the early 2010s, I watched with intrigue as older editors’ skin got tauter at each industry event. Yes, I knew the creams were great, but they weren’t enchanted. It was the age of injectables, smoke and mirrors, where celebrities and beauty editors alike would claim their tighter, glowing appearance was down to drinking ‘tons of water’ and their plumper lips were simply a ‘liner hack’. Today, tweakments are so common that I’m asked for doctor recommendations as often as nail salons, injectables are part of buy-now-pay-later or group offers and – much like someone would proudly show off where their outfit is from – aesthetic doctors are tagged on Instagram.

But, as business grows, questions of ethics are being raised. It was only in 2021 that a legal age cap was introduced for non-surgical injectable beauty treatments in the UK. Prior to that, it was up to the injector to decide if they wanted to inject say, a 16-year-old, even though their face is still shapeshifting into adulthood. That same year, the Botulinum Toxin and Cosmetic Fillers (Children) Act was passed, making it illegal to give botulinum toxin (anti-wrinkle) injections and dermal fillers to those under 18 in England. Then there’s the growing evidence of the link between people with body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) and these sort of procedures. ‘BDD is a serious mental health condition characterised by a preoccupation with perceived “ugliness”, defects or flaws,’ says Dr Benedetta Monzani, a senior clinical psychologist and clinical adviser for the BDD Foundation. As a result, many with the condition try to alter perceived defects with frequent and repetitive cosmetic surgery. However, fewer than 10% of BDD patients will be satisfied with the results of the plastic surgery, and their anxieties are often transferred to another aspect of their appearance. It is thought that around 15% of people seeking plastic surgery have BDD, which is why the availability of these seemingly ‘smaller’ procedures has sparked such concern.

In 2019, Superdrug came under fire for its decision to make non-cosmetic procedures accessible in some of its high street stores. The retailer then added a condensed mental health questionnaire to the booking process, including questions specific to BDD. The store said at the time that if patients asserted anything worrying during the process, the practitioner would refer them to their GP.

It’s been estimated that 85% of people worldwide, adults and teens, have low self-esteem

MPs want to take this further and are calling for stricter measures in the UK. As part of the health and social care committee (HSC) report, The Impact Of Body Image On Mental And Physical Health, published in August last year, they’re proposing more regulations regarding who can administer fillers [currently anyone can inject dermal filler but anti-wrinkle injections are prescription-only] and for the addition of a regulatory ‘safety taskforce’. They suggest a two-part consent process for anyone considering a non-surgical cosmetic procedure, including, at a minimum, a full medical and mental health history, as well as a mandatory 48-hour cooling-off period between the consent process and the procedure. But is this the answer?

Inject self-esteem

The whispers reached a crescendo. The nickname ‘freak b*tch’ was heard loud and clear by Farhana when she arrived at university at 18. This wasn’t what she had expected when, at 16, after being served ads on social media for non-invasive cosmetic procedures at local beauty salons,

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY; GETTY. DIGITAL MANIPULATION: SCRATCHINPOST.CO.UK

she had her first dose of filler. After that, she was hooked. Her friends would pool together for her birthday to buy vouchers to fund her love of filler, which she continued to top up in different areas of her face. The thing with adding 1ml of dermal filler here and there is that it can be hard to see how far you've gone when the tweaks are so small, making it easy to add too much. Without processes in place to support or check in on you, 'tweaks' can leave you far from how you looked before, but still wanting more.

After the bullying at university, she had all the work dissolved, reverting as much as possible to her previous face. But it didn't last. Shortly after returning to her 'natural' look, Farhana booked in for jawline and chin fillers. I get in touch with her injector and ask why he would work on her, and if he was concerned she may have BDD. All the GMC-registered doctors I speak to about injectables categorically tell me they would not inject if there are any red flags from a psychological point of view, and this includes Farhana's injector. In her case, she may have had low self-esteem (partly a result of the bullying) but, her injector feels, she wasn't symptomatic of BDD. It seems responsible injectors are already taking into account the issues raised in parliament, but they don't have an easy job on their hands. When it comes to something as individual as how we feel about ourselves, and what we think will help or hinder our appearances, this can be incredibly hard for someone to assess – particularly someone only meeting you once or twice. It's been estimated that 85% of people worldwide, adults and teenagers, have low self-esteem. But not everyone with low self-esteem is at risk of BDD, or becoming addicted to treatments. And many who undergo these sorts of procedures *are* happy with the results. The

American Society for Dermatologic Surgery (ASDS) collected data from over 6,300 patients and found that filler had the highest rating, with a 92% score in customer satisfaction.

Yet, in cases where a patient *does* have BDD (it's estimated to affect one in 50 of us), caution is needed. But what's the best way to go about this? The condition is hard to spot (many sufferers won't come forward, as they fear being labelled narcissistic or vain). As a society, we're so caught up in making comparisons, so is it possible to draw a line between healthy and unhealthy self-image, when that line varies drastically from person to person?

Conveyor belt practices

Aged just five, Kim Booker would assess every part of her body. From the freckle arrangement on her knees, to the shape of her toes, she would obsess over minute details. She was diagnosed with BDD as a teen and started getting non-surgical treatments aged 18. By the time she was 33, she had spent £17,000 on filler, anti-wrinkle injections and liposuction. She now campaigns for tighter restrictions on the ease with which these procedures can be accessed. 'From the aesthetician's perspective, when you are altering a person's appearance, it needs consideration, reflection on the person's character, what their goals are and time to study their unique beauty/anatomy. When this time is removed and replaced with a conveyor belt process, the safety drops dramatically,' she says, noting she would often go into a clinic with a list of what she wanted and receive it 15 minutes later. 'I saw flaws that needed to be corrected and the impulse to do so immediately was frighteningly strong. I could not see beyond my illness.'

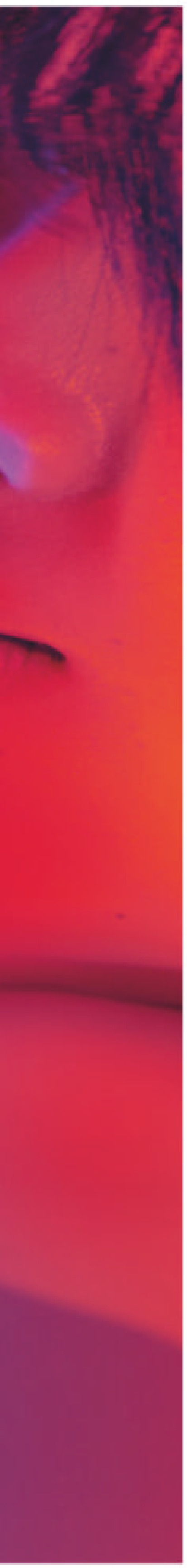
If there were stricter rules in place at the time Kim had her first treatments (in the early 2000s, the start of the filler boom), she's not sure it would have stopped her, but she does believe 'it would have maybe prevented me from having too many procedures at once that often resulted in complications and regret. The quick jump into procedures was often met with months of mental torment when the procedure went wrong and didn't meet my expectations or desires.' One of the biggest issues, she tells me, lies in what drives someone to book an appointment at a clinic in the first place – as she acknowledges that, 'in the right hands', treatments can help with confidence.

'The current issue is that many people want to change the true structure of their bodies to meet completely unrealistic beauty standards, rather than enhance or refine their own unique beauty,' she says. 'Unfortunately, there are many companies out there who are very happy to facilitate this and will view it as a commercial endeavour, rather than putting the client's best interests first.'

Filler and filters

With 914,000 followers and clients such as Love Islanders Amy Day and Harley Brash, Dr Ahmed El Muntasar is the most-followed UK aesthetic doctor on social media. Along with showing pictures and videos of the difference that non-surgical treatments can make, his content is also

'I saw flaws that needed to be corrected and the impulse to do so immediately was frighteningly strong'



punctuated with tongue-in-cheek commentary on having to fix botched work by unqualified beauty therapists. And what is it that drives patients into the cash-grabbing hands of such unscrupulous injectors? I assumed that Dr El Muntasar, who has clinics in London, Cheshire and Leeds, gets an awful lot of messages asking him to mimic the work of specific celebrities and influencers. 'No,' he shakes his head. 'Over the last six years, more and more people are bringing in an edited photo of themselves to the clinic. The photograph will have five filters, Facetune, and a whole different situation to what's in front of me, and they'll expect me to be able to recreate digital augmentation with non-surgical procedures.' In such sensitive cases, he treads carefully to ensure he gets his clients to a happy medium.

Good injectable work is about gently smoothing or plumping, not mimicking digital augmentation. As Dr El Muntasar and my most recent injector, Dr David Jack, note, anti-wrinkle injections and fillers are often lumped together, but there are many different types for different areas of the face and a reputable doctor will understand the right ones to use to get to your desired look. Once healed, a good tweakment should be pretty undetectable to everyone but yourself and although they will dissolve and wear off, that doesn't mean you need the exact same amount for your top-up if you choose to rebook.

I did spend some time assessing what had been said after my appointment, thinking about whether it was needed or not and perhaps it did make me assess my appearance more than I do on any other day. But the key difference is that it didn't affect my life in a noticeable way. I didn't cancel any events or spend hours looking at myself in the mirror. Importantly, I had spent a decent amount of time with my injector, thoroughly discussing my needs and motivations. But other injectors may not be as scrupulous. The new wave of social media-savvy salons use the 'discover' page, alongside offering discounts or freebies in exchange for modelling for social media pages, so as to find the clients willing to drop their cash to emulate the 'perfect' filtered face. But, as Dr El Muntasar says, there's no such thing. So when the client doesn't get exactly what they want, what do they do? They keep going back for more and more treatments. The impact that filters and social media comparisons have on our mental health has been well documented, and when this crosses over into an ability to literally change our appearance to match a false persona, I can see how easy it would be to become addicted, or even to develop BDD.

Secret insecurities

When I met Georgia Seago through work, we just clicked. I loved her fun and fiery personality, but the first thing I thought about when I met her was how beautiful she is. I never questioned for a second that she might have body issues. But as we became closer, she started to open up more. Her 'double chin' insecurity has seen her try a variety of medical aesthetic procedures to dissolve fat, snatch, freeze and tighten the area that I have never looked twice at.

Five years on, having found a non-surgical treatment that works for her, she barely mentions it at all. And despite being confronted with more non-surgical options every month [she was the editor of *Aesthetic Medicine* magazine in her late twenties] 'fixing' one thing hasn't left her wanting to fix more. 'I do still compare myself with others when I'm scrolling, but I don't think [non-surgicals] are too accessible,' she says. 'Because I don't think there's anything wrong with wanting to tweak how you look.' If good tweakments make you feel better, then why should government ministers have any say in creating obstacles to your goal? If Georgia had had to do a mental health screening before her tweakments and they knew how much she obsessed about her chin, would she have passed? I can't say. But what I can say is that since having them she has never been more confident.

When it comes to screening for symptoms of BDD, and adding more time with a cooling-off period, I can see how this could help prevent some of the more harmful impacts of tweakments. And there definitely needs to be more regulation in who can offer these.

But another part of the government's plan is to have a mandatory mental health background check. Should someone who suffers from depression or anxiety (which, considering our current mental health crisis, is many of us) be prevented from receiving these treatments? How about someone with an eating disorder? I spoke to multiple mental health experts about this and they all agreed that it was incredibly hard to say. 'Anxiety can make a person second-guess their worth and tie it all to appearance. And those suffering from depression can often perceive themselves as less physically attractive, or suffer from comparisonitis (comparing themselves to others),' says psychotherapist Dr Belynder Walia. 'Body-image distortion, with anxiety and depression, can cause a person to think that they're not acceptable and this can lead to so many mental and emotional ailments, including eating disorders.' She adds that this all ties in with non-surgical treatments, as they offer a person the opportunity to feel better in their skin, while in some they could further deepen the anxiety and depression, particularly if they go wrong. But surely we also have to be careful not to stigmatise those with mental health issues and act as if they don't have autonomy over what they do with their appearance.

When it comes to mental health and body image, there's a risk, no matter what. Stop someone and it could deepen their insecurities and send them further into a spiral, but if there's a free-for-all on these treatments, with unscrupulous practitioners preying on insecurities, then the risk of addiction or developing BDD is also high. The crux of the issue is that ever-fluctuating beauty standards continue to be perpetuated through culture and this will affect our relationships with body image and the lengths that we will go to obtain our 'ideal' look. No matter how many restrictions are put in place, unless this changes, the lure of tweakments will live on. ◆

Activewear? Really?

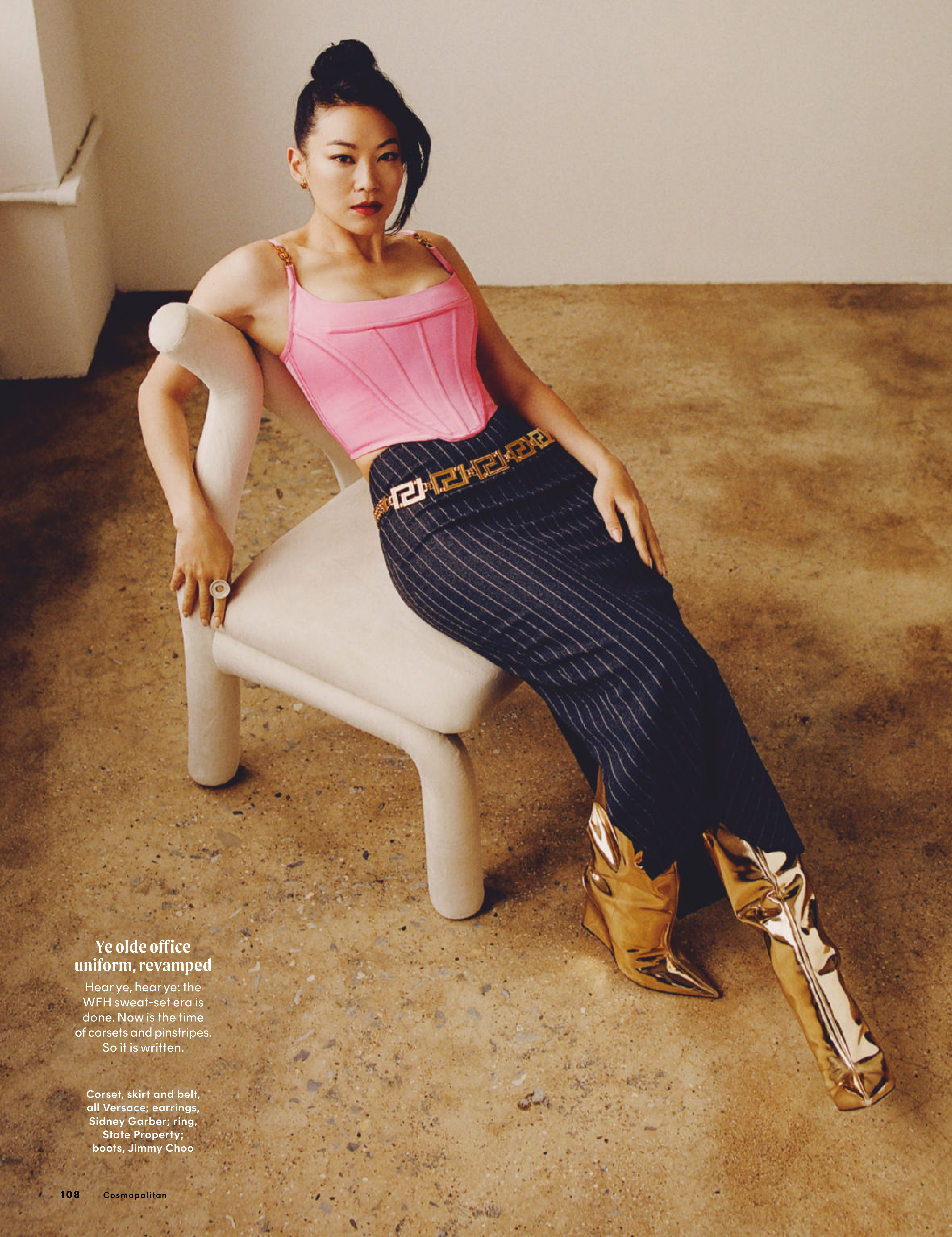
Yes, correct! Think about it: sporty vibes balance out the boudoir and land you somewhere in the middle. Remember when 'versatile' was just about black trousers? Lol.

Dress, Adidas x Gucci; earrings, Uncommon Matters; pumps, Gucci

CORSETS

Still sexy, now cool. *Partner Track*'s Arden Cho demonstrates the perfect Valentine's Day-style MVP

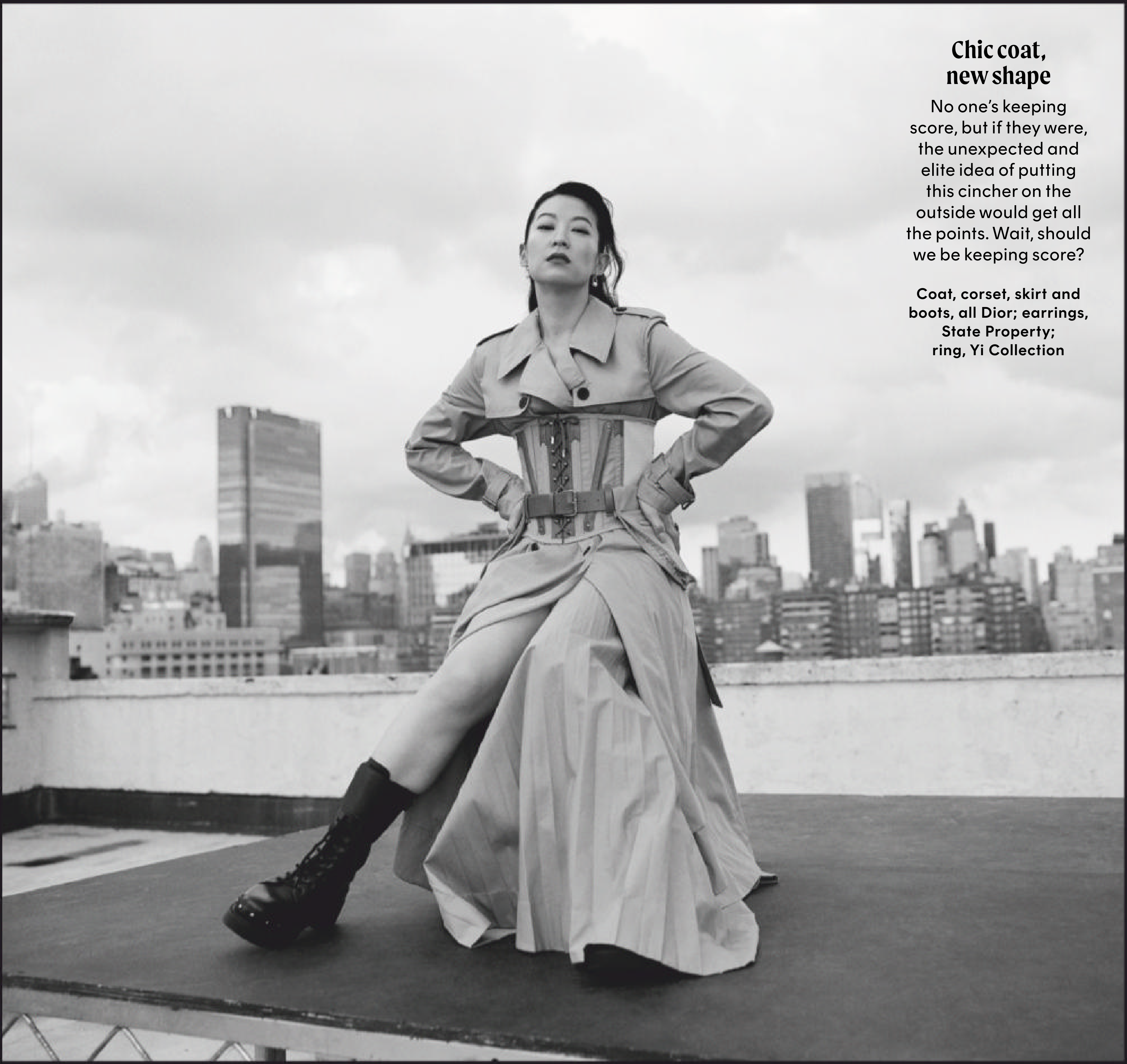
PHOTOGRAPHY: KENDALL BESSENT
FASHION: CASSIE ANDERSON
WORDS: BENNA CARPENTER



Ye olde office uniform, revamped

Hear ye, hear ye: the WFH sweat-set era is done. Now is the time of corsets and pinstripes. So it is written.

Corset, skirt and belt, all Versace; earrings, Sidney Garber; ring, State Property; boots, Jimmy Choo



Chic coat, new shape

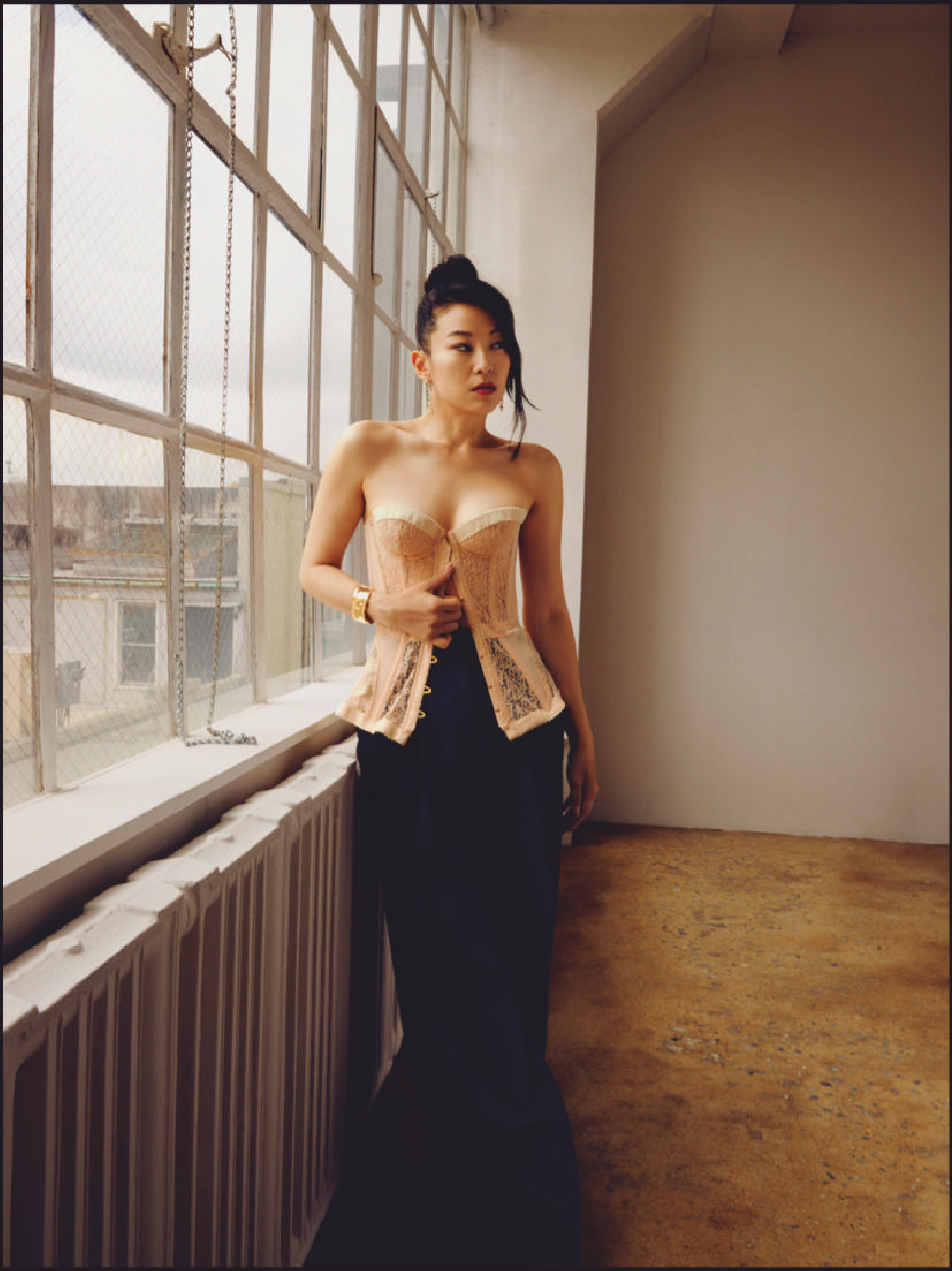
No one's keeping score, but if they were, the unexpected and elite idea of putting this cincher on the outside would get all the points. Wait, should we be keeping score?

Coat, corset, skirt and boots, all Dior; earrings, State Property; ring, Yi Collection

FOR SHOPPING INFORMATION, GO TO COSMOPOLITAN.COM/UK

About our model

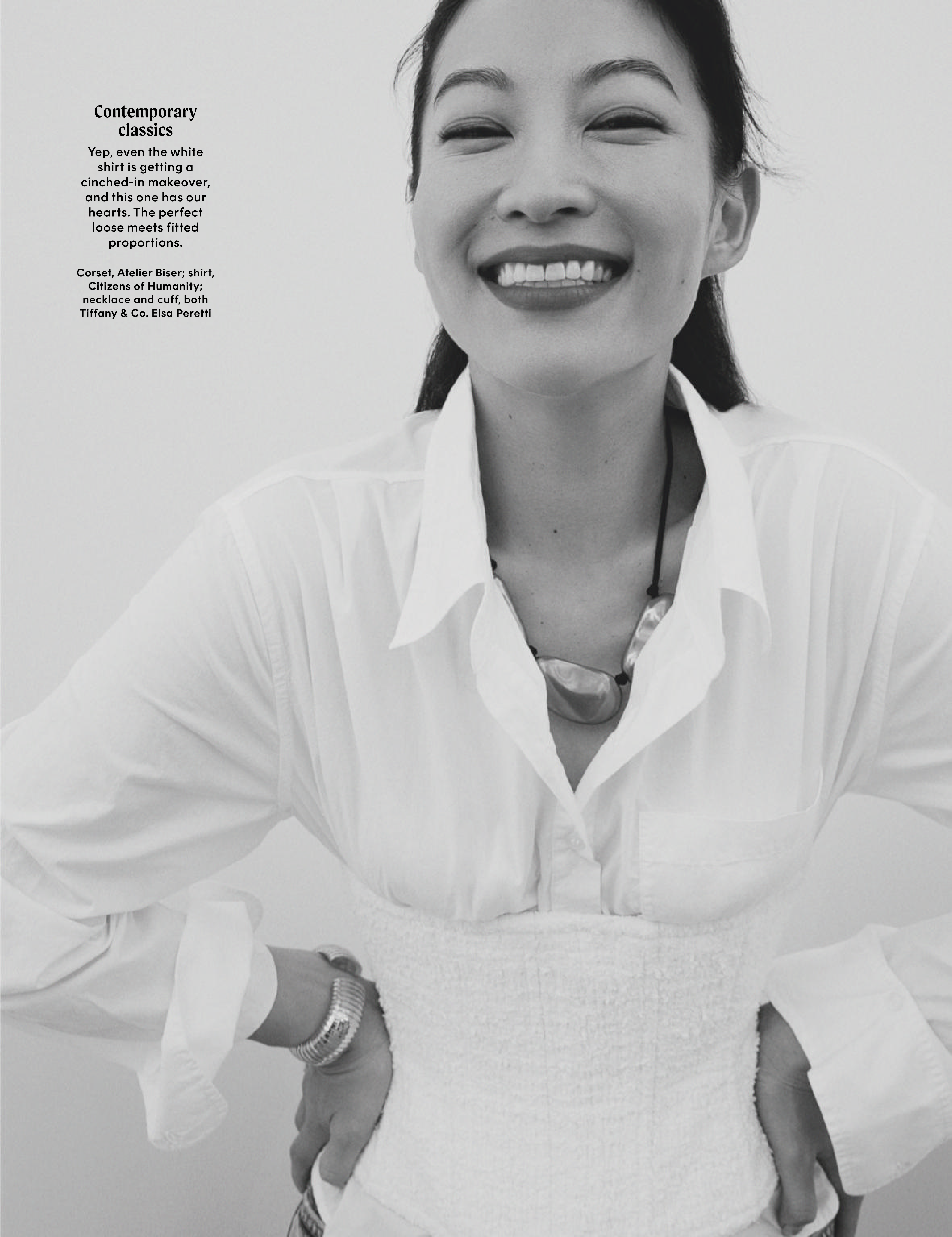
It takes a certain level of boldness to turn down the franchise that cemented your status as a must-watch actor. Double that boldness for speaking out about your industry's inequality, as Arden Cho did when she declined to be in the *Teen Wolf* movie adaptation of the show because she'd be paid far less than her co-stars. Triple that boldness for then taking on the role of June in the highly anticipated live-action remake of *Avatar: The Last Airbender,* coming to Netflix soon. Quadruple... kidding, you get it by now: Arden is a total badass. So take her at her word (pose?) when she shows you the chic world of corset dressing in these pages, then binge her just-as-juicy legal drama *Partner Track* on Netflix again.



Revenge who?

If your next formal event calls for a full-on *moment* (eg, your ex is present), please make it this.

Corset, Agent Provocateur; trousers, Dorothee Schumacher; earrings, State Property; cuff, Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti



Contemporary classics

Yep, even the white shirt is getting a cinched-in makeover, and this one has our hearts. The perfect loose meets fitted proportions.

Corset, Atelier Biser; shirt, Citizens of Humanity; necklace and cuff, both Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti

Don't call it basic

To be honest, a lingerie moment has never *not* spiced up an otherwise simple ensemble.

Bustier top, trousers and belt, all Carolina Herrera; ear cuff, Alexander McQueen; necklace, Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti; rings; State Property; pumps, Roger Vivier

Modern romance

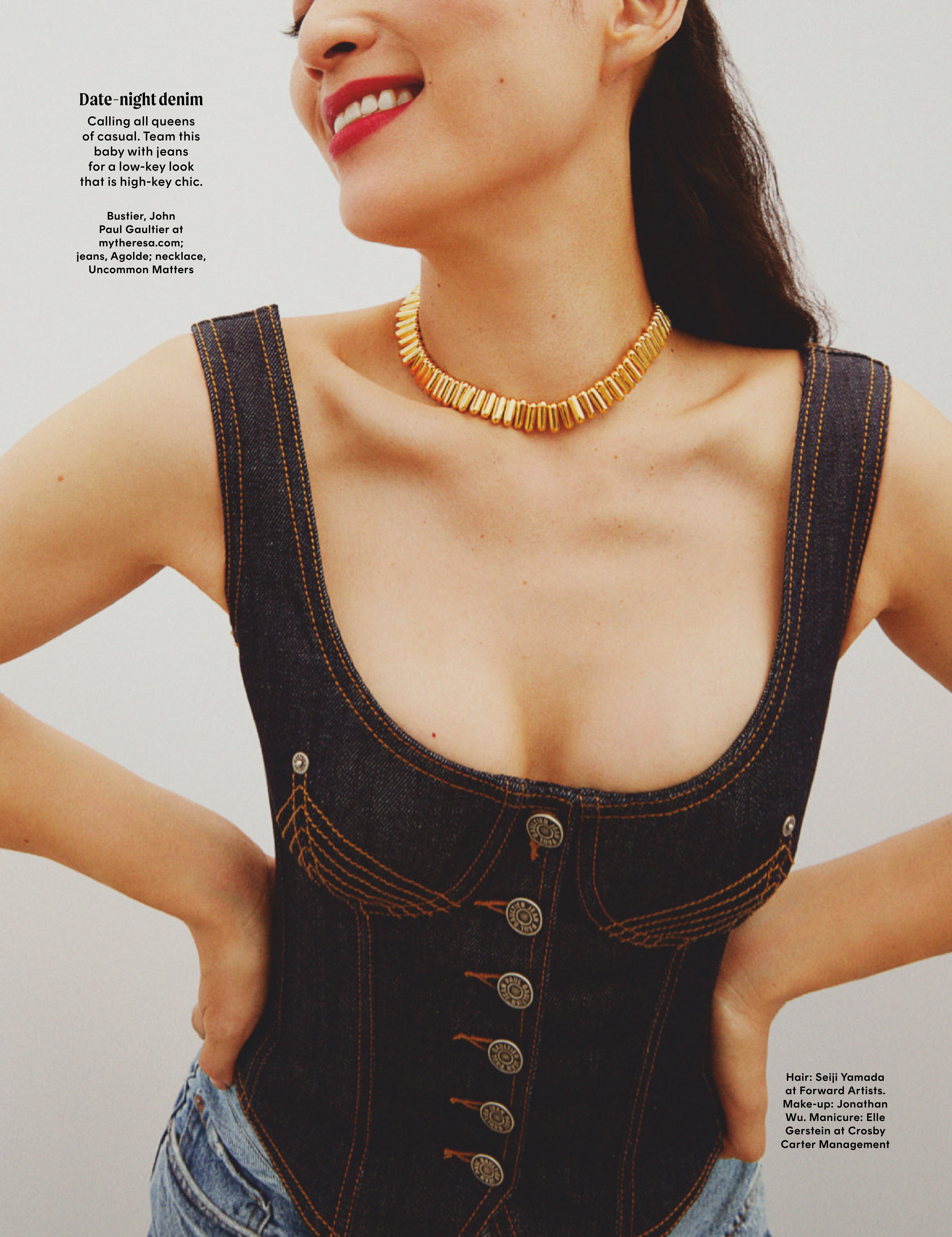
Dainty lace in pastel tones and the perfect ribbing. Whether you're on a Galentine's or Valentine's Day vibe, this is the perfect style to step out in.

Bustier, Fleur du Mal; jeans, Agolde; necklace, Uncommon Matters; ring, Sidney Garber

When it's the whole outfit

Some corsets — like some people — are made to be the star of the show.

Corset, Atelier Biser; Briefs and tights, both Wolford; earrings, Tiffany & Co.; ring, State Property; boots, Manolo Blahnik



Date-night denim

Calling all queens
of casual. Team this
baby with jeans
for a low-key look
that is high-key chic.

**Bustier, John
Paul Gaultier at
mytheresa.com;
jeans, Agolde; necklace,
Uncommon Matters**

**Hair: Seiji Yamada
at Forward Artists.
Make-up: Jonathan
Wu. Manicure: Elle
Gerstein at Crosby
Carter Management**

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Angela Console Table

Anisa Ridged Tableware

Milah Cotton Stripe Table Runner

WILL YOU BE MY VALEN-DINE?

Minimise the winter blues by hosting and celebrating in style. Whether your Dry January plans are now long gone or you want to host a special Valentine's dinner, a stylish dining table – such as the Stephanie Dining Table above – is always the centerpiece of a great dinner party. Add the gorgeous Milah Table Runner and top it off with the stunning Anisa range of tableware – both featured above – and you've earned yourself a 'style expert' title, just like the experts at *House Beautiful* Marketplace. And remember, you get free shipping on any orders over £30!

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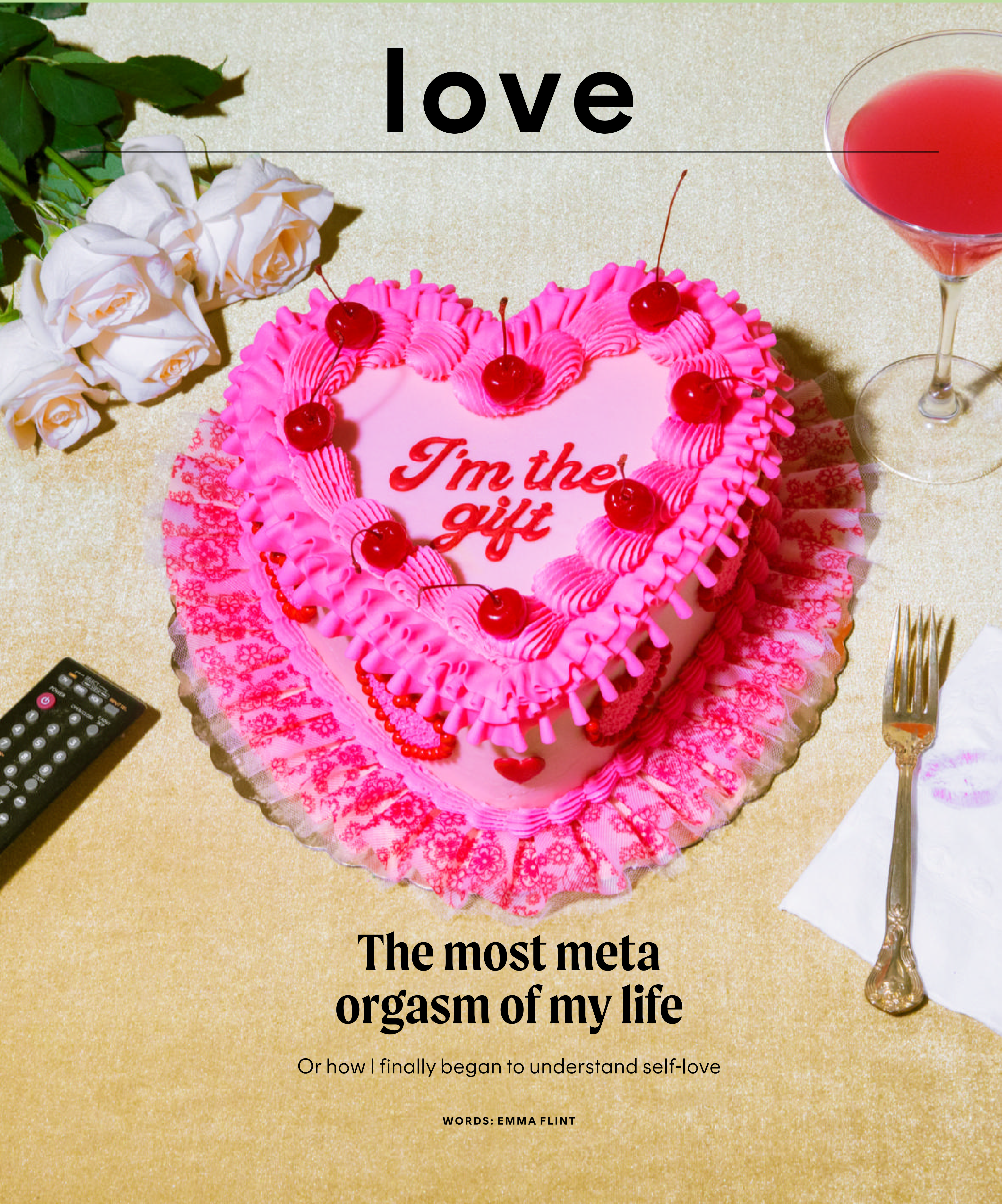
love



The most meta orgasm of my life

Or how I finally began to understand self-love

WORDS: EMMA FLINT

Ten minutes into scrolling through bad, jackhammer-y porn, I was ready to give up. I was horny and desperate to get off to something that wasn't so performative or obviously filtered through the male gaze. I wanted to see a real person experiencing genuine, orgasmic pleasure.

A real person like… well, me. That's when I realised I'd never find that someone in any video – unless that someone was actually me.

I didn't have the interest (or the time, let's be real) to attempt to get myself cast in some kind of off-Broadway version of a porn shoot, but there was something instantly sexy about the idea of filming myself right there on my phone. Except. Every insecurity I've ever had begged me not to open my camera app.

There was the way I hated how my boobs sagged, the stretch marks I was always trying to cover up. To be captured somewhat permanently, exposed, in motion, on display? And sure, I thought, I'm sex positive – but sex positive enough for this?

Intrigue (and horniness) won out. I set up my phone across from me, got out a vibrator, and pressed 'record'. And then… I was caught up in the moment, running my hands over my stomach rolls, feeling the warmth of my fingertips shooting what felt like electricity through my stretch-marked skin. It was hot. So hot that I came – quickly and intensely.

Satisfied, I put the video out of my mind for a while. I wasn't sure if I'd ever watch it back, or if I should delete it rather than risk the shame I thought I might feel the second I pressed 'play'. But the next time I wanted to come and instinctively went to pull up porn, I paused. I figured I owed it to myself to see what I'd captured. So I propped up my phone again, this time in playback mode, and turned on my vibrator.

You know what? It was still really fucking hot. The self-disgust I was expecting never came. There I was, a body type rarely seen in mainstream porn, enjoying myself in the most intimate of ways. I was now a voyeur to my own pleasure, and it was so arousing that I was able to overlook the details I usually fixate on in the mirror.

I've had some incredible climaxes in my life, but what happened next was different. Every inch of me was tingling – my eyes even lost focus. And just when I thought I was done, I felt the strangest sensation. My muscles started clenching around my vibrator again. I was going straight into another orgasm, and this time, I squirted. Hard. For the first time ever. When I finally recovered (and honestly, I have no idea how long that took), I just lay there in breathless silence.

It was the strongest orgasm I've ever had. Not to mention a radical education in what my body – my body! – could do. Was it enough to erase years of hating what I look like in photos or cure all of my insecurities forever? No. But being able to see myself accepting pleasure – not from just anyone but from me – was a revelation. It showed me that my form is so much more than something to hide in the dark during partnered sex. It's the vessel to my own satisfaction.

And yes, since I know you're curious, I still have the video. It makes me feel like my phone is a white-hot secret vault – whenever I hand it to someone, I have a moment of panic that they might swipe to it. But not because I'd mind. Instead because it is, of course, all for me.

EMMA FLINT is a gender fluid queer writer who specialises in LGBTQ+, mental health, entertainment and sexual welfare topics. Their work has been featured in *The Independent, Futurism, Wired, Diva magazine*, and others.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BETH SACCA. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

PSA: sex aftercare is worth your time

Taking a moment to connect and be extra affectionate after sex: not just for the BDSM crowd

WORDS: CARINA HSIEH

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

Clean each other up…

A partner who cares enough to wipe up bodily fluids = extremely sexy.

… and suggest a bathroom break

A loving reminder to pee means no one has to worry about UTIs.

Get water and snacks

Yes, you need both for ~replenishment~.

Cuddle

You can be a person who goes wild during sex but also wants to snuggle afterwards. It's obvious but a great way to bond post doing it.

Watch an episode of your favourite show together

Or three episodes… or even half a season. Sometimes, the comfortable familiarity of *The Office* is exactly what you need after an intense sex session.

Play with each other's hair

So tender, so underrated. Make it next-level with a fingertip scalp massage.

Talk about it

An absolute must if you *are* engaging in kink or BDSM, but also really nice after any kind of action. Sex can make you feel vulnerable, and admitting that out loud is the ultimate intimacy.

The truth about low libido

WORDS: MEGAN WALLACE

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

The reality is that sexual desire and appetite are far from constant: they wax and wane throughout your life. One year you might be the horniest person alive. The next, sex might be the furthest thing from your mind (and loins).

And when it comes to relationships, well, it's no secret that sexual chemistry can peter out with time. The longer you've been with someone, the more the inexplicable, blazing attraction that drew you together becomes a flickering hearth – homely, yes, but for better or worse not likely to set your life on fire. So, are there ways to take control of your libido? Keep reading to find out...

The four causes of low libido

While it's normal to go through periods of low libido, it may help to know there are plenty of reasons why you might be experiencing a dip in your sexual appetite. 'There are, predominantly, four areas that can cause low libido: physical, hormonal, psychological and relationship issues,' says sex therapist Danielle Bennett. With so many potential triggers to consider, it can help to get to the bottom of why you might be experiencing low libido. This, Bennett explains, ensures you can take targeted action to amp up your sexual appetite. First: head to your GP. They may take a blood test to investigate potential thyroid issues, check if you've had any vaginal dryness and look at the side effects of any medications you're on, including the contraceptive pill. If the medical route doesn't provide any answers, it's time for a bit of self-discovery.

Designate a 'sex night' – and reconnect with your body

This can take the form of basic self-care, such as ensuring you sleep, take time to get creative, eat well and avoid alcohol (which can inhibit sex hormones). Danielle also recommends 'self-focus exercises' or sensate focus exercises, which ask you to sensually touch your body without initially including movements that may lead to orgasm or sex, in order to 'feel comfortable with your body'. If you're more of a planner than an explorer, Danielle advises that people in relationships pick out specific days and times for sex – just make sure it's not bedtime. 'Choose a prime time for sex that's not at the end of the day, when you'll usually be winding down and ready for sleep.'

MOT your mental health

Sometimes, you need to dig a bit deeper into the cause: the role that your mental health plays on your sexuality cannot be understated. Studies have shown that depression can often lead to a decrease in sexual interest, and that sexual trauma can seriously change your relationship with sex. 'Mental health can have an impact on libido, especially anxiety and trauma related to a negative sexual experience,' says Danielle. 'When having sex, or even thinking about having sex, the person can be triggered and go on to develop a negative reaction or phobic response to sex and intimacy.' If mental health could be the reason behind a decrease in sexual interest, it may be worth attending sex therapy – either privately or through your GP.

For more, go to cosmopolitan.com/uk/low-libido

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

A truly compelling argument for name-dropping your therapist on the first date

At least if you want a second one

WORDS: VERONICA LOPEZ

We're not saying you should unpack every single detail of your personal trauma with a newbie before the appetisers arrive, but if you're in therapy, intel shows that it can actually work to your advantage if you – casually! – mention it. But before you start coming up with reasons not to, know this: a Hinge study found that 83% of UK singles would prefer to date someone who goes to therapy. The study also found 81% of UK users are more likely to go on a second date with someone who mentioned on the first date that they go to therapy. However, only 9% felt comfortable bringing it up. That means there's a big gap between the thing we all think is attractive and the people who take advantage of it... so be one of them? Here's why it works and why you should hop to it.

A commitment to self-improvement is legit sexy

Obviously, dating someone who's in therapy isn't a magic cure-all for any relationship problem ever, but just knowing that they're actively working on improving themselves? Attractive as hell. It means that your date is more likely to be self-aware, emotionally resilient, and open to problem-solving and adapting, says clinical psychologist Rebekah Montgomery – all super-desirable qualities to have in a partner. And someone who's willing to prioritise bettering themselves, not to mention being open about it, will probably be more likely to bring this productive energy to a relationship. 'I really appreciated the vulnerability,' says Elaine Hunt, a 28-year-old communications coordinator, of a first date with a guy who Went There. 'I figured it meant he'd be a better communicator.' Needless to say, he got to date two.

It's kind of a vibe check

The sooner you bring up therapy, the sooner you can gauge their reaction. If they're weird about it or pry in a way that feels icky, then it's up to you to decide if you're interested in seeing them again. (And by the way: only you can decide what level of curiosity you're comfortable entertaining, and it's okay if that level is literally zero.) But if they are supportive and they treat it like any other cool new thing they discovered about you, then you know that they're worth your time. A mature partner will react to therapy in the same way they'd react if you told them you go on a weekly run to get out some stress. Both are valid forms of self-care.

Plus, it might help your date open up to you even more. Transparency invites transparency. Hinge director of relationship science Logan Ury describes it as a hook. 'If you're presenting a very polished exterior, there's nothing for anyone to grab on to. But if you show them the little cracks in your shell that you're nervous to share, suddenly there's something for them to hold on to, making it easier to connect,' he explains.

Take Cindy Ferreiro, a 29-year-old marketing director, who met her boyfriend on Bumble. 'After I opened up about my therapy journey, he opened up about his,' she says. 'To this day, he says my honesty was attractive and it made him want to pursue me more.'

Bringing it up doesn't need to be a whole thing

It can be as easy as a passing mention of something you recently talked about in a session, says Todd Baratz, a sex therapist and psychotherapist. You don't need to overshare, and you can peg it to something relevant to another topic you're discussing. That can sound like, 'I was talking work-life balance in therapy and...' when you're already talking about your interests. Maria Avgitidis, CEO of matchmaking service Agape Match, suggests mentioning it as part of your weekly routine, like, 'Mondays are *Love Island* catch-up night, Tuesdays I have Pilates, Wednesday is therapy...'

By opening up, you're telling your date you're providing a safe space for them to do the same. What's hotter than that?

Friends forever?

How does your social life stack up in comparison with others'? We asked the big questions about mates, 'girl code' and beyond…

WORDS: JENNIFER SAVIN

When friendships are good, they're *so* good. The best, in fact – who needs romance? But when they're bad, lacking and leave you feeling disconnected (or comparing your pals with TV cliques), it can all feel a bit sh*tty and stressful. So how is everyone feeling about their friendships today? We found out…

The numbers

51%

of us are happy with our social lives right now. And for those who don't feel like a social butterfly, the top reasons include...

1

Friends settling down with a partner, or having a baby, and you not being on the same life path

(although **33%** said becoming a parent changed your friendships for the better)

2

Money worries, especially with the cost of living crisis

3

Moving somewhere new

4

Work schedules clashing or feeling too tired to socialise

5

The aftershock of the pandemic (friends keen to hang out virtually but less so in person)

How often?

22%
hang with pals once a week or more

while

41%
see friends a couple of times a month

26%
manage a catch-up every few months

and

10%
say they hardly ever get to see their mates

Social envy

62%

say they have a 'best friend'

and

60%
of us feel the pressure to have a tight-knit, all-female squad like on TV

65%
of us confess to feeling jealous of other people's friendships on social media

while

23%
admit to making it look like they're having a better time with mates online than they actually are...

5%
of women say they've made a close friend online

2.6

is the average number of 'best friends' a British person has (according to one Snapchat global poll of 10,000 people).

4.3

is the average number of 'best friends' people have around the world, along with 7.2 'good friends'

Breaking bonds

12%
of us have hooked up with a friend's ex-partner and...

37%
...called it a 'big mistake'

35%
...said 'these things happen'

28%
...felt 'a bit bad – but not enough to stop it'

9%

of Brits have a friend we don't really like (savage)

Almost one in five women **(17%)** say their close friendships weakened during the pandemic

Finding friends

35%

of Brits find making friends 'fairly difficult', but...

14%
still made a new friend in the past year

5%
of women say the majority of their pals are men

26%
have friends they've never met in person

4%
have forged a friendship out of pity

21% of Gen Z say they only need a month to decide if someone warrants 'best friend' status, compared with...

15% of millennials

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY. SOURCES: *COSMOPOLITAN* UK SURVEY: YOUGOV

ESSENTIALS EDIT

This month's top tips

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with Retinol
Specialist Skin Care

LOOK YOUNGER LONGER REGENTIV SPECIALIST SERUM (WITH RETINOL)

This delicate and oh so effective serum for lines, wrinkles, crepey eyes and neck, vertical lip lines, sun damage and much more. Unique formulation of retinol palmitate, aloe vera, vitamin E, SPF, moisturiser – perfect to use twice daily. 35ml £32.95, 50ml £49.95, 105ml £79.95, 200ml £149. To receive exclusive 15% reader discount apply code **COSMO15** when ordering. **www.regentiv.com** or call **01923 212555** for advice or to order. Please see website for full range and special offers.

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BEAUTY EDIT

Look good, feel great

THE NEXT GENERATION SKIN BOOSTER: THE SECRET TO ACHIEVING RADIANT SKIN, 365 DAYS A YEAR

Hydrate, glow, and contour with Seventy Hyal 2000.

The new year brings a flurry of optimism, expectations, and resolutions for a new and improved you. But despite most new year's resolutions failing after just a few days, we're determined to make glowing skin a year-round priority.

As the landscape of skincare continues to change, one thing that remains the same is the longing desire for luminous-looking skin. With more clients forgoing the 6-step skincare routine in favour of a skinimalist approach, skin boosters flaunt a low-effort yet highly efficient solution for complexions craving moisture.

Taking the minimalistic approach to skin care, Next Generation Skin Booster Seventy Hyal 2000 seeks to revitalise dehydrated skin with long-lasting benefits. Formulated with a high molecular weight of miracle molecule hyaluronic acid (>2000 kDa), the skin-enhancing injectable seeks to transform parched complexions for a rejuvenated and revitalised appearance. Plus, with impressive bio-stimulating capabilities, Seventy Hyal 2000 works simultaneously to encourage the production of new collagen and elastin stores to help combat skin laxity.

Further commended for its advanced ability to add long-lasting radiance and a temporary contouring effect to the skin, Seventy Hyal 2000 has been hailed as 'The Next Best Thing in Injectable Skincare' by adoring patients and skin enthusiasts nationwide.

seventy hyal
2000

Before

After

Now an unassuming go-to for many, Seventy Hyal 2000 is the perfect skinvestment for those seeking a stripped-back beauty solution.

This versatile treatment can also be utilised to help with various skin concerns in different areas. Popular for rejuvenating the skin, lips, under-eyes, neck, décolleté and hands, Seventy Hyal 2000 offers immediate and visible results after a single session. Typically, the injectable requires 2-3 treatments, spaced four weeks apart and results can be maintained with top-up treatments every 6-12 months.

If you're struggling to achieve luminous-looking skin despite trying every skin solution in the book, add The Next Generation Skin Booster to your tweakment list for feel-good skin, 365 days a year.

Enquire about Seventy Hyal 2000 in your local clinic or find out more at **www.seventyhyal.co.uk** and **@SeventyHyal**.

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NANCY VUU
www.nancyvuu.com

The comedian and voice of *Love Island* on strange items, signature dishes and his pop-punk playlist

Iain Stirling

WORDS: DUSTY BAXTER-WRIGHT

What items do you always have in your fridge?
I once bought these vitamin shot things that you're meant to have instead of coffee. I never managed to do it so now they're sitting there wasting away.

What is your prized possession?
My wife [Laura Whitmore] was a torch bearer for the London 2012 games, so we've got an Olympic torch in our house, which is pretty cool. It's not technically my prize, but it's my prized possession… it's my possession by the laws of marriage.

If you were locked at home for 24 hours, what would you do?
I would play Fifa non-stop, have a few cans of lager, a curry and an early night. That would be the dream.

What was the last TV show you binge-watched?
Chernobyl. It's only five episodes; I think I managed about four. It's quite hard going, so I had to watch an episode of *Friends* at the end to cheer me up.

What's your signature dinner party dish?
A good, old-fashioned spag bol, probably Quorn-based (or 'plant-based', as I believe the modern kids say).

Post-shower, are you getting dressed straight away or sitting for hours in a towel?
I bring my change of clothes into the bathroom and immediately get dressed upon drying.

What's on your house party playlist?
Noughties pop-punk. Blink-182, Sum 41, New Found Glory, etc.

Have you ever had a surprising celebrity housemate?
The comedian Phil Wang and I used to live together. I don't know if that's surprising – we're both stand-up comedians, we both live in London, but I lived in his flat… until I didn't.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT CROCKETT

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wellman
MULTI-VITAMIN
GUMMIES
22 nutrients
Siberian Ginseng, Co-Q10
60 vegan
natural orange flavour gummies
VITABIOTICS
UK's No1 FOR MEN*

YUMMY GUMMIES
with
SERIOUS SCIENCE†

22 NUTRIENTS
DELICIOUS TASTING
VEGAN FRIENDLY
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2022-11-16_ADWELWEWGCONP_E

From Boots, Superdrug, supermarkets & **vitabiotics.com**

***Nielsen GB ScanTrack** UK Total Coverage Value & Unit Retail Sales 52 w/e 8/10/22. To verify contact Vitabiotics Ltd, 1 Apsley Way, London, NW2 7HF. UK's No1 men's and women's supplement brand.

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- With 4 Different types of Hyaluronic Acid including Super Hyaluronic Acid
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LOTION Anti-Aging
SUPER HYDRATOR
Super Hyaluronic Acid™
Collagen & Retinol
fragrance free
5.1 FL OZ (150 ml)

* Intage Data - February 2022. † Retinyl Palmitate